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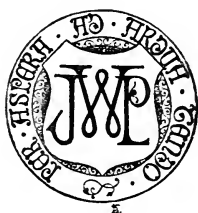


AGGESDEN VICARAGE

OR

BRIDGET STOREY'S FIRST CHARGE

A TALE FOR THE YOUNG



IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON

JOHN W. PARKER AND SON, WEST STRAND.

1859.

[*The Author reserves the right of Translation.*]

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AGGESDEN VICARAGE.

CHAPTER I.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

Along the floor with silent foot of gold
Steals the warm sunlight ; freshly as the day
It glittered on our darling's flaxen hair,
Our eldest boy, noisy with drum and fife,
Saying he'd be a soldier when a man ;
Ah me ! we dreamt not then the end—
It was God's will it should be as it is.
There hangs upon the wall his sword and sash,
Faded beneath a burning Indian sun.
Poor boy, he bravely died ; we had his Captain's word
For the young Ensign's honour in the field.

ANDREW WINTER.

JOHN'S holidays were passing swiftly away ; on the very next Saturday he was to return to Eltham. He and Mary had for the last month worked regularly at French and German from nine to eleven ; and the pupil had never quarrelled with his mistress, nor the mistress with her pupil. The Thursday before he left home Frank and himself were engaged to spend at Mr. Hughes', who now had two brothers-in-law from Rugby with him ; these boys had a week ago spent a day at Aggesden,

and revived all the vividness of Frank's longing to be a schoolboy himself. The thought of the life to which John was so soon returning, exasperated him ; he could not or would not believe but that if his father chose, if it had been Johnnie, the favourite, who was about to be left behind, he would have managed somehow to send a second son away from home.

Mr. Arnold had for the last week or two watched the daily growth of Frank's discontent, but having nothing more with which to meet it than the unsatisfactory sympathy he had given him in the winter, thought it best to leave it alone, and not allow the subject to become an open grievance between them.

This night the two boys did not come home from Marshland till nearly ten, when they came in bright and happy and good friends enough ; and Mr. Arnold rejoiced to think that the change and spirit of this day might carry them safely through the only day now intervening before John's return. But before breakfast the next morning some dispute must have occurred, for Frank came down looking hot and indignant, John sullen and irritable — that is, carrying neither failing to anything like its ordinary exhibition in Frank whenever *his* temper took this turn ; but sullen and irritable for so sunny-tempered, obliging a boy. He ate but little breakfast, and seemed quite angry at his abstinence being noticed ; then, seeing how he had surprised his father, said, in more of his ordinary tone, 'He would have some more tea, if mamma would let him change his mind.'

French and German, however, soon, to the

Vicar's relief, parted the brothers; and, before eleven came, Frank was off for Massing with Harry, to get a cricket-ball, and did not return till dinner, about which time came such a heavy shower of rain that trees and earth were drenched, and, though soon afterwards it ceased, the brightness of the day was over and the air chill and damp after the late heat. From his study the Vicar heard some angry, sullen words pass in the garden between the two boys, and then John went by the window alone.

As soon as his sermon was finished, the Vicar was meaning to go to Massing himself; but somehow he did not quite like leaving the two boys behind him, and so looked into the drawing-room to say, as he had done twenty times before, these holidays,

‘Johnnie, I’m off for a walk, will you come?’

John was half-sitting, half-listlessly lolling on the sofa reading, and instead of saying, ‘oh, yes,’ and springing up at once, as he had always hitherto done, only turned round to answer—

‘It looks so wretched and uncomfortable, papa, I don’t think I shall come out.’

‘Why, John, what laziness! You have hardly been out to-day.’

‘I was about after dinner.’

‘Just for two or three minutes; you had much better come, and you know,’ a little reproachfully, ‘it will be the last walk we shall have.’

John hesitated and coloured. ‘Yes,’ he muttered after a minute’s pause, ‘only I shall never get this finished if I’m out all the afternoon.’

‘And you prefer your book to me?’ But, though provoked into saying this at the minute, the Vicar felt it was neither kind nor just to bring the two attractions into this sort of collision, and added kindly, ‘Well, then, stay and read it. I dare say you’re tired of my incessantly walking to Massing; so, good-bye! and tell mamma I shall be in by tea-time.’

John made no answer, expressed no sorrow, only as little Mabel came up to the sofa to look for her missing cotton, said, crossly, ‘What *do* you want? there it is!’ and sent her off roughly.

Mr. Arnold turned back, surprised, pained, and thoroughly puzzled.

‘I tell you what, John,’ he said in a tone he had scarcely ever used to his son before, ‘I think a walk will do more good to your temper even than your body,—lolling on the sofa over a novel is not a way in which I would let you spend the afternoon, were it not your last day;’ and so, lingering in the hall one moment in hopes of Johnnie’s still joining him, was gone.

John watched him out of the gate, then went upstairs, flung himself on his bed, and cried such tears as he had only once before shed in his life.

Nor did he appear again till tea-time. Frank came in asking for him, and Mabel saying he had gone upstairs, Frank there followed him, but came down again without him, and was forced to be content with Harry for a companion instead.

Mr. Arnold could not but observe how pale and heavy-eyed his son was at tea, and thought he

had been needlessly harsh ; that very likely the boy was feeling the leaving home this second time far more than the first, and had wished to stay with his mother, though ashamed to say so ; and so took especial pains to treat his favourite lad as if no hard words had ever passed between them, and celebrated the last evening, at Caroline's previous special request, with a round game for which his expedition to Massing had furnished him with plentiful prizes.

A great deal of laughing and excitement followed, and the Vicar forgot John, and when he remembered him again was rejoiced to find him joining, his natural, bright, courteous self again, in the half joke, half dispute he was himself suddenly called upon to decide between Anna and Harry. And yet how sadly this one display of ill-temper had disappointed him ! He had learnt to look on Johnnie so entirely as a son who not only never *made* care, but who did all he could to prevent others doing so also.

None of the children, not even Amabel herself, went to bed to-night, 'Johnnie's last night,' till after nine, an unheard-of event, and when they were gone, the elders settled quietly into their work or reading—Mr. Arnold to the Hughes' *Athenæum*, John to some book, not, however, *Dombey and Son*, which was that he had been reading in the afternoon, but *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, which he had been reading with Mary. Mr. Arnold feared his own disparaging remark on novel-reading then might have prompted this unnatural change, and so said, without looking up from his paper :

‘ *Dombey* done, Johnnie ?’

‘ Not quite, papa ; very nearly, I——’

‘ Oh, but you had better finish it ; at least if you like it. We shall all be a little late to-night, I dare say.’

But John did not change his book, and as soon as prayers were over wished good-night with the others. Mr. Arnold kept the boy’s hand one second, but John’s eyes avoided his, and the cheek he turned away had become crimson.

The Vicar dropped the boy’s hand with a sudden fear ; what could account for conduct so unlike all John’s previous behaviour ? What but that some fault unconfessed was lying heavily upon him, and changed his usual frank affectionateness into this constrained but resolute avoidance of the pleasant equal intercourse which all through these holidays had been so delightful, so refreshing to the father, and had made him feel so sure that nothing would ever come to mar the friendship existing between himself and this one son at least.

John said good-night to his mother, and with her did lay his weary head for a minute on her shoulder and let her smooth back his hair, and kiss his forehead again and again, and say his hands were cold, and so find excuse for fondling them ; as if such affection were indeed a refreshment and comfort. Ah ! it might only be his needless harshness in the afternoon that had made John shy with himself, with the father who had never used so hard a tone to him before ; and how trifling had the cause been even here !

John and Frank were still bedfellows, and the

first was to start so early the next day, that if the one present opportunity were lost, father and son might part without one more satisfactory word passing between them. Many might smile to think how the Vicar's heart bled at the very idea of such a parting with his lad having become a possibility ; he sprang up, opened the door, saw the two boys just turning round the corner of the stairs, and called—

‘Johnnie ! I want you one minute.’

‘There, I told you so !’ said Frank, savagely, continuing his way and taking care to get into bed so quickly himself that *he* could not be called down to any such conference.

‘You are not well, John ?’ said Mr. Arnold, tenderly, struck by the alternate flame and pallor of the young face before him.

‘Oh, yes——,’ John stopped short.

‘Something is wrong, my boy. Can’t you speak out to your own father ?’

Still John stood silent.

‘Well, John, to relieve my mind, tell me there is nothing much wrong, nothing that need prevent my saying ‘God bless you,’ as trustfully as when you left us six months ago.’

‘Oh, papa !’ and he turned away his face.

‘Come, in here,’ said the Vicar gently, leading the way into the dining-room. ‘Now, sit down, think it over, and see if you cannot be open with me.’

The Vicar stood himself, his elbow on the mantelpiece, his head on his hand. What could all this mean ? That his son had so long been so far above

reproach, his character so fair, that now a fault (of which another boy might have thought nothing) was lying heavily upon him, and yet he could not bear to face the blame, or disgrace, or mere loss of good opinion which might follow his confession? That disgrace was the cross, one hitherto so upright and irreproachable had yet to learn to bear. After five minutes' silence, Mr. Arnold turned round again.

'I cannot bear to speak angrily to you the last night, Johnnie, but you must feel your whole conduct to-day has been very unsat——, very unlike yourself.'

'Oh, yes!' he said heartily, as if it were a comfort to assent heartily to anything, and rising.

'Well, if you will not speak out, I must question you. What accounts for such behaviour?' No answer. 'Is it because you have done some boyish wrong of which you are ashamed to tell me?'

'Oh, no; not that, papa—only—'

'What, my dear boy?'

But Johnnie gulped down the rising sobs, and answered, 'only I am so wretched.'

'You find the second leaving home very different from the first?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Well, Johnnie, we must remember life is full of such partings; but happily we may look forward to many such happy meetings as this has been, in between and amongst them. You don't know how I have enjoyed these six weeks. You have become such a friend and companion that I think, my boy, no parting will prove long enough to lessen

this affection and mutual confidence. Now you ought to be in bed ; but we are alone—so a last kiss, my boy ; we must not so demean ourselves to-morrow. Good-night—God bless you.'

'Oh, papa, I have been so cross—so——'

'Yes, John, you have ; I can't deny it. But such sorrow is new to you ; you will bear your next more bravely, I am sure. Last winter you were as eager as you are now loth to leave us, and I would rather this latter feeling should be the last one, much as it pains you.'

Mr. Arnold himself drove John over the next morning to Massing, turning away to hide his own emotion and a choking in the throat to which he had been long a stranger, as he saw John cling to his mother as if nothing could, nothing should, part him from her. 'Now, John,' he said, quickly at last, 'it is time we were off—there, a general good-bye to the rest will be enough ; get in,' and he hurried his son into the carriage, sprang in himself, and drove off quickly.

Johnnie leant back, and turned his face out into the road ; Mr. Arnold sat upright, and took no notice of his son till they were within five minutes' ride of Massing, and then made some casual observation, but it was a very broken voice which agreed that it was clearing into quite a fine day. 'Come, Johnnie, turn round and let me look at you ; don't let the station-master see your wet cheeks,' said Mr. Arnold, rallyingly, yet in a tone that showed he meant the hint to be taken. But John could not recover himself ; he sat upright, and kept his quivering lips together ; but tear after tear trickled silently

down his face, and fell unheeded on his hands. As they entered Massing, however, he made a desperate effort, dashing his hand across his eyes, pulled his cap over his brows, and made some spontaneous but utterly heartless remark about the enlargement of Mason's shop ; but Mr. Arnold responded to it, and would not let even this uninteresting conversation flag until they had reached the station, and luggage and ticket must be looked after. They were rather late, and he sent John after the ticket, whilst himself seeing the luggage safe into the van of the train, which was already stopping. 'Come on, Johnnie, or you will be left behind,' almost irritated by the boy's slow movements. 'There, get in, you have a book?—all right. Good-bye—God bless you!' The Vicar sprang off the step, and the train was off. He stood watching the long line of carriages till they were whisked far out of sight, then turned to leave the platform, with a sigh—one of the first sighs John had in any way cost him.

Later in the day Bridget Storey was expected back. The Vicar put up the pony-carriage in Massing, and walked home himself, meaning to send Frank in to drive her back again—to begin to make him of some of the use that John had been whilst at home. Just about the time the Vicar was thus walking home alone, Bridget was parting with her own friends, her mother seeing her safely off at Paddington. Bridget had enjoyed her holiday, and their fortnight at Margate very much—oh, very much indeed ; but the parting from those at Laurel-terrace once over, the train to convey her to Wor-

cestershire once in motion, she looked forward with such real pleasure to the home before her, to having again some further object in the day than to enjoy herself, that sorrow soon faded away before the anticipation of the pleasantness of the duties of the life to which she was returning.

Frank did walk in, to drive Miss Storey back ; not at all liking it, but unable to shirk a duty about which no choice was given him. And if the boy who drove her home this autumn was not so good-looking nor so pleasant as he who had done the same deed for her last October, Frank was now a year older himself, and behaved with very fair civility and attention. As kind a welcome as Bridget had pictured awaited her at the Vicarage ; but she found the party rather quieter than she had fancied it. In fact, John was gone, and as yet his loss was too recent to be forgotten by any one for more than two or three minutes together.

The regularity and sameness of the next day's occupations, however, did much to restore its usual even tone to the family, and when Monday and its lessons began, minds and things returned once more into their usual train of business and pleasure, and went on cheerily enough. It was not till Tuesday, however, that the news of Johnnie's safe arrival could reach Aggesden Vicarage ; but then it did, and, after his few lines, the Vicar went about as briskly and happily as ever.

The next morning's post brought a letter from a hand that first puzzled, then rather alarmed him. He opened it quietly, however, and read :

Eltham.

‘DEAR SIR,—I regret to say that your son has ever since his return seemed suffering more or less bodily or mentally, although he made no complaint of any illness or injury till this afternoon, when he was forced to confess his inability to receive his drilling-lesson with the other boys. He speaks of some fall, and consequent injury to his back, making little of it himself; but I do not feel authorized in letting any such injury (however slight it may prove) remain unlooked to, on my own responsibility. I have sent your son to lie down now, and have already asked Mr. Clay (our usual medical adviser) to call in and see him as soon as he returns from his rounds. Trusting that I may exaggerate the importance of the case, and that you will not be unnecessarily alarmed,

‘ I am, my dear Sir,

‘ Yours truly,

‘ T. ACTON SMITH.

Tuesday.

‘ Should you wish to come up to town and judge for yourself, Mrs. Smith will be most happy to provide you with a bed. I will write Mr. Clay’s opinion by the second post, thinking it may save a day.’

‘ Frank, what is the matter !’ cried poor Mrs. Arnold, anxiously, seeing her husband’s cheek grow pale as he read.

‘ It is from Mr. Smith,’ he answered, clearing his voice, and trying to hide the shock the letter had given himself, under as much of his usual calm tone

as he could so suddenly assume. 'Johnnie is not very well—no illness feared, my love—but he complains of his back ; he has had some fall, whether before or since his return——'

'His back !' interrupted Mrs. Arnold, terrified. 'Oh, Frank ! remember little Annie, and now Robert Merivale,' and the poor mother gasped for breath.

'I—I do remember,' said the Vicar, shutting his mouth tightly to smother the groaning within him. 'God help us !' and he sank his head upon his hands ; he ! the strong brave man, ever before so thoughtful, so careful of his wife. It was her turn now to repay a little of the exceeding tenderness to the husband who had never yet thus given way before her. Mrs. Arnold rose, went up to her husband, kissed the hands hiding his face from all, and said gently,

'Dear Frank, that is looking on very far indeed ; very likely it is nothing but what at the worst a few weeks' rest will cure ; let me see,' and she took the letter softly from his hands.

Bridget rose, and the children followed, and left the husband and wife alone.

The next thing they heard was that the pony-carriage was ordered, and Mr. Arnold starting immediately for town. He came into the schoolroom to say good-bye, and was shocked at the pale, tearful faces he found there. 'My dear children, I am glad to say both mamma and I think we jumped too hastily to an unfavourable conclusion : on reading Mr. Smith's letter again, our first alarm seems quite unfounded. If it had been anything very serious, we may be

sure, placed in the responsible situation Mr. Smith is, he would have called in a first-rate opinion at once. No ; I am only going now because I cannot keep away—must see the dear fellow for myself. I take all your loves with me, I am sure.'

'Oh, yes!' cried all, eagerly, little Mabel adding, 'Give him a kiss, papa, from me.'

'Twenty, my little girl, if you like,' snatching her up ; 'good-bye, my little sweet! You must all be good children and give mamma no trouble while I am gone.'

'We will try, papa,' said Robert, heartily.

Mary was sitting on the window-seat, her face against the panes, far too wretched to be spokeswoman.

'And now I must be off, to be home again to-morrow, I hope, perhaps Johnnie with me. Mary dear, you will like to see the letter? Mamma will show it to you if you go to her ; you will send Thomas in for the second post letters ; you will get further news from them sooner than myself ; but I cannot wait.'

'I will fetch them,' said Frank, gruffly.

His father had hardly noticed before that he was there. He half started at his son's voice, and then laid his hand kindly on his shoulder, and said,

'Have you any special message, Frank?'

But the boy made no intelligible answer, twisting from under his father's hand as if ashamed of having betrayed even as much feeling as he had done already.

CHAPTER II.

A STRAY SUNBEAM.

Oh ! you,
 Earth's tender and impassioned few,
 Take courage to intrust your love
 To Him so named, Who guards above
 Its ends, and shall fulfil ;
 Breaking the narrow prayers that may
 Befit your narrow hearts, away
 In His broad loving will.

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

FRANK did walk in for the letters, and whilst his father was still on his wearisome journey, reached home breathless, Mr. Smith's promised letter in his hand.

'You open it, Mary,' said his mother, turning away, a sickening feeling at her heart now comparative certainty was within reach.

Mary took it in her trembling fingers, but read low and distinctly every word.

'DEAR SIR,—I regret to say that Mr. Clay concurs with me in thinking your son's case requires instant attention. He fears the evil effects of the injury have been aggravated by the delay which has already occurred ; and advising immediate further advice, I have ventured on my own responsibility to call in Reeves Willis. I will telegraph his opinion, should

not my first letter, as I now hope it will, have already brought you up to town. In case parochial duty detains you, feel assured that both Mrs. Smith and myself will do everything in our power to make your son happy and comfortable till you can join him and decide what steps had better be taken. He has, indeed, made himself such a favourite in one half year with both masters and boys, that I can assure you this accident has thrown a damp over the whole school.

‘In haste, yours &c.,

‘T. ACTON SMITH.’

There was a silence when Mary finished, first broken by Anna’s tearful—

‘I am glad they are so fond of him.’

‘Yes, nothing can be kinder,’ said Mrs. Arnold, dreamily. ‘Thank you, Mary,’ and she took the letter and went upstairs, saying, first, ‘Will you make tea, Miss Storey?’

Oh, what a sad painful evening that was! Father and mother away, and Bridget not liking to cheer and amuse, knowing it was best all sorrow should have full vent, and fearing that to amuse the younger children would be, in their present state to excite them, and how trying and heartless would such merriment sound to the poor mother upstairs.

Mary sat at her work, some handkerchiefs of John’s which she had not been able to finish before he left home, and which were to have been sent after him. Anna, who never hitherto had worked a stitch she could avoid, came and begged for one, and sat as

hard at work now as if poor John's cure depended on her diligence, her ready tears dropping fast upon the handkerchief as she hemmed it. Even Frank stayed indoors, and sat listlessly near the window as if he lacked energy to do more than watch evening change into dusk, dusk into night.

Meanwhile Mr. Arnold had reached his journey's end, seen his boy, heard Mr. Willis's opinion. John, he found, on his back, indeed, but comparatively bright and well, as though his father were just then all he wanted ; but, poor fellow, the surgeon's opinion had yet to be broken to him ; that as far as he could judge upon one visit, the boy's submission to be kept entirely on his back for two years, or it might be, three, could alone save him from deformity.

How could the father break such an opinion to his boy ? He could but set his lips tightly together, and try to hide from his fellow-men how the cup that was given him was bitterer than he himself could drink ; how, then, could he put it to the lips of his young aspiring son ?

Yet it must be done. He could not face Johnnie and appear calm and cheerful, with this secret lying between them. For nearly an hour the Vicar sat in the study, where Mr. Smith had left him, dull, motionless, almost stupified. He would not rouse himself to life, to the capability of comprehending all the present and future misery that Reeves Willis's opinion entailed. Then Mr. Smith knocked and entered.

‘ You have had nothing, sir, since your journey,’ he said, kindly ; ‘ Mrs. Smith is having tea up-stairs, will you not join her ?’

‘Oh!—no thank you,’ answered his guest, dreamily ; but starting up the next moment, added courteously, ‘you are very kind, but indeed I do not feel the want of anything. You have a pretty neighbourhood, I believe? I think I will go out and see a little of it, before going up to my son.’

Poor man ; see a little of the neighbourhood. It was already dusk. But Mr. Smith was too kind to oppose, only begged him to wait for a minute, and then sent down his wife with a glass of wine, which he felt the father could not refuse at her hands. Nor did he. The very sight of a woman, a gentle motherly woman, touched and softened the Vicar’s chilled heart in a moment.

‘Your son has been asking what you were about,’ she said gently, her eyes full of tears, though this the room was too dark for her guest to see. ‘He will be pleased to hear you are enjoying a little fresh air after your hot wearisome journey.’

‘He will,—he never thinks of himself.’

‘No, he is the most unselfish, uncomplaining little fellow. My husband says the schoolroom seems quite dull without his sunny, sweet-looking face. But I will not keep you.’

And she went back to her husband, ordinarily a clever, kind-hearted, but fussy and rather conceited man, doing his work well and knowing that he did so.

It might be too dark to see the neighbourhood, but nature proved the best soother, best comforter, best consoler. The sun was down when the Vicar started, but still had left a few soft, melting tints

behind, and as one by one the clear stars came out in the pure sky above, something of the softness, serenity, and submissiveness of all around him stole into the father's restless mind. A voice began to whisper within him :—

‘It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good.’

And nothing broke the heavenly stillness of the quiet country fields, till the bugle from Woolwich garrison rose clear and shrill in the distance ; how often must John have heard and exulted in that sound as the badge call of his profession ! and yet with this sad thought, at the same time came another :—

‘ Soldier of Christ, arise,
And put thy armour on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through His Eternal Son.’

‘Amen,’ said Mr. Arnold aloud, pushing back his hat, and looking up with a relaxed, softened face into the evening sky. ‘My boy may never be the soldier of an earthly monarch, but he is still a soldier of his Heavenly King, and this honour no man taketh from him—nor from myself ; yet how am I rebelling against the decree of Him I am bound to obey, and that cheerfully. ‘The cup that my Father has given me, shall I not drink it ?’

And so he walked back to John's school, and went straight up to his son.

‘So you have been out, papa ?’ the boy said, brightening into a smile at once.

‘Yes, just a little way into the fields. How have *you* been ?’

‘Oh, better.’

‘No pain, you mean?’

‘Very little; only the remains of Mr. Willis’s pokes.’

‘He hurt you, poor fellow?’

‘Horridly once or twice; but it only makes being still seem more comfortable now. It is not half so bad as I thought, being up here all this time.’

‘Mrs. Smith has been with you?’

‘Yes; she only went when she heard you come in. You can’t think how kind they have both been. I used to laugh at Mr. Smith once; I am sorry now.’

‘Trouble teaches us our true friends, Johnnie.’

And so they sat quietly and in silence a few minutes, and then, with a prayer for nerve and tact, the Vicar asked, ‘And what did Mr. Willis say to you?’

‘Not much. He made me walk a little, poked me about, and told me, when I screwed up my face to prevent crying out, he knew he was hurting me—he meant to do it. I don’t think he said anything else; but he and Mr. Clay were to talk me over,’ and the boy, as if recalling this, suddenly leant up on his elbow; then, with a little start of pain, lay back again.

‘What did they say, papa? How long am I to be kept here? Not after this week?’

But Mr. Arnold only turned away his head, apparently to snuff the candle; but he snuffed it out, and then, in the dark, tears gathered in his eyes unseen; yes, and fell down a face unstained by tears since, fifteen years ago, he had stood beside his mother’s grave.

‘Papa,’ began Johnnie, alarmed.

‘Yes, I am here’ (turning round). ‘Dear John, it breaks my heart to tell you; but I know you would rather know the worst at once, without any so-called preparation. The injury to your spine is so serious, Mr. Willis says, that, if you wish ever really to get the better of it—to grow up a straight, active man, I mean—you must be content for two years (or it may be more), to lie up as you have done these two days.’

John made no answer. Then, after five minutes’ silence, said, ‘thank you,’ and then was silent again for twice as long a space.

Mr. Arnold turned round at last. ‘My poor boy!’ he said; and just then the moon broke from behind a cloud, and streamed full into the room, and on John Arnold’s face, and glistened on eyes full of tears, indeed, but upon lips on which there was a smile.

‘Why, Johnnie!’

‘Papa, come here. Put your arm under me—so. Papa, do you remember now?’

‘What?’

‘What you used to call me when I was little, and you used to let me cuddle into you when I said good night.’

‘My little sunbeam!—oh, Johnnie, don’t talk of those days;’ and the father groaned aloud.

‘Papa, what do you think has come into my head? Do you remember that book with the odd title you liked so much—*A Trap to catch a Sunbeam*? I was thinking this fall had only caught

you your Sunbeam a little longer than you meant to have him.'

Mr. Arnold bent down and kissed the boy's face.

'You wont send him out again, papa, will you?' in the soft, caressing tone of ten years ago—the tone Mabel had now made her own special property at the Vicarage.

'God bless you! but Johnnie, you do not realize yet—'

'Papa, I do not want to. Let me to-night only think of that one side.' And so he laid his head upon his father's arm, till there was a knock, and the maid came in with his supper. Then, when it was eaten, the Vicar said good night, and rose to go.

'Papa, don't be so miserable,' whispered Johnnie. 'You pity me so very much because you think I do not know what lying two years idle on my back will cost me!' and his lip quivered; 'but I—I do. I can never be a soldier; I wonder it does not break my heart to give it up. I thought the first minute I must die—could never bear it—to be a burden to you instead of an honour and help; but now, God is so kind to me, I do not seem to see *that* side any more; but papa, I do know it is there.'

'God bless you!' said the Vicar, again, his voice choking.

'Papa'—with a bright smile. 'Why, you scolded me only last Saturday for crying. Oh, papa, I do think it is your knowing now what made me not walk with you to Massing, and your loving

me just as you did before, that makes nothing else seem hard.'

'My boy, I was not angry.'

'But you were very sorry,—and it was so very hard to bear.'

The Vicar stood a few minutes thinking : then turned round as if a sudden thought had struck him—

'*This* prevented your walking last Friday? Then it was done before you left home ?'

'Did I say so ?' asked Johnnie, in some anxiety.

'Yes—at least implied it. Then Mr. Smith is wrong ; it was no fight with, what did he say the name of the boy was—Capel ?'

'Oh, no ! he hasn't accused any of them ?' eagerly.

'No. He said you would not tell how, when, or where it happened ; and that he respected the feeling and would not press you.'

'He was very kind about it. Papa,' suddenly, 'you will be the same ?'

'I don't know, Johnnie. I have a right to know. I would not betray you.'

'Papa, I have promised,' said the boy, simply.

'Friday,' mused the Vicar ; aloud, 'Ah ! then, Johnnie—'

'Papa,' said John, much distressed, 'I cannot, ought not, do not want to tell ; please never say things that may take me unawares, and help you to guess.'

'Never wilfully, Johnnie, I promise you. Good night, once more ;' and the Vicar left him. But his mind would run on this one theme : Friday,—why

that was the day after the one he spent at the Hughes' ; true, he had seemed happy and well enough when he came in, but what more likely than if he had promised to conceal his injurer, he should assume such conduct to avoid suspicion of any hurt ?—a part he might well find it impossible to act on the succeeding day. And again Mr. Arnold groaned as he thought how he had let John's listlessness rouse himself to harshness. Much as he mourned those few words, he little knew what they had cost his son, how they had pierced to the heart the boy who so loved, so honoured him.

Bearing up under pain and languor he could never forget, returning with both to the rough wild waste of school, bound to betray neither, he then found the cost of all this endurance was to be, not only his own misery and discomfort, but the far worse trial of a first misunderstanding with his father. To feel he had pained, disappointed, and grieved him, yet might never tell him why ? And so what a load was, by the forced confession of his fall, taken off the boy's heart and mind, the Vicar never knew. To see his father trust him, love him as he had trusted and loved him of old, was just now so great a blessing, that the cross that had restored it to the lad, seemed, as yet, comparatively light and easy.

Only comparatively—for when Mr. Arnold was gone, John, though he had been surprised at his father's tears, turned his own head into his pillow and cried himself, on and on and on. But who cannot bear a grief which is not too deep for tears ?

For another week John was to stay at Eltham, that Mr. Willis might have better opportunities of coming to a decided opinion as to the exact extent and demands of his young patient's injuries, and on one of these days Mr. Arnold went to London to see the Merivales. He had never written to tell them of his being in town: much less what had brought him; he shrank from sealing his boy's fate in black and white. He felt it was cruel to himself and them to take them unawares, and yet—as the humour was in him to go—he would not stay to announce his coming by writing, but went. He was shown into the drawing-room, where was Sir Hector romping with Emma and Annie; Sophy reading to Robert, or trying to do so, in a distant corner; and Lady Agnes employed on an elaborate piece of worsted work; Antoinette chatting by her side; vases of geraniums, mignonette, and heliotrope brightening and perfuming the room, signs of wealth, happiness, ease, and taste all around.

'Mr. Arnold!' cried Sir Hector, 'do I hear aright? Why, where have you dropped from? Very glad, indeed, to see you, though;' and he wrung the visitor's hand heartily.

'We had no idea you were in town, Mr. Arnold,' said Lady Agnes; 'pray sit down. Have you been in London long? Is Mrs. Arnold with you?'

'No; my wife is at Aggesden:—thank you.'

'Then mamma will feel equal to asking him to dinner,' whispered Sir Hector mischievously to Sophy.

'But she is well, I hope?' continued Lady Agnes, with no lack of courtesy.

‘Yes—but—’

‘Arnold,’ said Sir Hector suddenly, ‘something is wrong. Tell us.—For God’s sake, not my little Mabel?’

‘No ; but,—God forgive me, it would have been easier to bear so, than as it is.’

‘Arnold, pray speak out ; not Anna, not Mabel ?—then the most precious, oh, Arnold !’ his tone of relief suddenly changing into one more full of anxiety than ever, ‘surely, not Johnnie?’

‘Yes.—I am frightening you. I beg your pardon. He has met with a fall,—his back is injured. Two years—’

‘Two years, what?’

‘He is to be kept on his back. It may be more, —*possibly* for life, Reeves Willis says, now.’

‘A fall ? Who ? what ? when ?’ asked Sir Hector, impetuously.

‘I don’t know ; he will not tell ;’ and the Vicar rose and went suddenly to Sophy. ‘You have some amusing book, there?’ he asked, abruptly.

‘Don’t treat us in that way, Arnold, as if we had not human hearts,’ interrupted Sir Hector, almost angrily ; ‘that dear, sweet fellow is ill, hurt. Now, tell us, can we do anything for him?’

‘If we could, Mr. Arnold,’ said Lady Agnes, warmly, leaning forward, as if eager that her offer should be accepted, ‘we should be so very glad. Would you like to have him in town nearer Willis? Within reach of every advice? We could make room for him in a minute, to-night, even ; we

could send Aggy and Miss Campbell to Netta, and he should have a room on the first floor.'

'Thank you very, very much,' said the Vicar, recovering himself and speaking quietly and collectedly again, 'I did once think of asking you if you could take him in. Willis's charges for coming out so far are enormous. I can't complain, his time is his money ; but the heat and bustle and noise of London would, I fear, do more harm, than further advice would do him good.'

'We *are*, unfortunately, a very large, noisy party, and there is Sophy's ball to-morrow,—but after that—'

'Mamma, I know,' said Netta, rising suddenly, and, going up to the Vicar, she laid her hand upon his arm entreatingly : 'Let him come to us, Mr. Arnold ; come, both of you, we have no company, no visitors. You should have a room at the back looking into the Park, almost as cool and fresh as Aggesden itself. We shall be so pleased. I know Harry will be as much so as myself ; he loves dear Johnnie as much as I do, almost.'

'Thank you, we will come,' said the Vicar, too much touched by such kind, universal sympathy to find more words than these few simple ones.

'To-day,—to-morrow, whenever you like ; thank you : ' and the young Countess hesitated one moment, then kissed her old friend's cheek tenderly.

'God bless you,' said Mr. Arnold, and sitting down, a silence fell on all, first broken by Lady Agnes quietly sending the children out of the room.

So the Vicar went back, cheered, comforted, and softened : his own words had been proved true to himself, 'Trouble teaches us our true friends.' Ah ! and let us rail at the world and its selfishness as we will, trouble finds us many a friend we never knew before.



CHAPTER III.

FRANK.

Wake ! wake !
 All ye that sleep !
 Pray for the dead !
 Pray for the dead !

Pr. Henry. Why for the dead, who are at rest ?
 Pray for the living, in whose breast
 The struggle between right and wrong
 Is raging terrible and strong.

The Golden Legend.

THE morning of the second succeeding day, John was moved to Carlton Terrace. Mr. Arnold was glad no longer to feel obliged to trespass upon Mr. Smith's unceasing kindness, and so, with many hearty thanks, withstood his own and his wife's kind pressing to stay where they were a little longer.

Some of John's chief friends came up to bid him good-bye. It was the most trying moment he had yet passed through. He was leaving them behind him, strong and well, to finish a course, which it had so suddenly been decreed he should not follow with them. And they felt, too, that their strong limbs must seem a cruel mockery to their maimed school-fellow. One of the roughest boys in the whole school, the Capel before mentioned, just pressed his old schoolfellow's hand tightly, then gave it up and burst into tears.

This would never do. Mr. Smith, thick-voiced himself, cleared the room peremptorily, and then bade a hasty good-bye to the little fellow, who had, in one half-year, won a place in his kind, boisterous heart, no pupil had ever made his own before.

‘Good-bye, Arnold. I hope we shall see you back again before very long. Good-bye ; God bless you,—we shall always be glad to hear of you. Come, Lucy,’ to his wife, but he was forced to leave the room without her, for he could not trust his self-command a moment longer, and to have appeared red-eyed amongst his boys would have cost him,—what ? perhaps a few sneers from those whose approval or disapproval was of equal unimportance, but would have gained him more respect and love than ever yet had been his, from the generally right-feeling body of his pupils.

Mr. Arnold was very glad when the boy was safe in the comfortable carriage that Antoinette had sent for him, and the very house out of sight. Then he first looked at him ; oh, poor John, he was realizing it now ! And so the father left him to himself, and read or appeared to read the *Times*, which Mr. Smith had flung upon the seat, as a last little token of kindness, as they were driving off. It was a long journey, more than ten miles, and before it was over John was very fagged and weary—carefully as the man had driven.

Antoinette, who had all the morning been watching for her guests, came out quiet, thoughtful, tender, to meet them ; spoke a few words of welcome to Mr. Arnold, enquired fondly after John’s fatigue,

and then went back into her drawing room whilst the boy was carried upstairs.

Then, after a few minutes, she hovered about on the stairs, hoping Mr. Arnold would come out, and at last he did so.

‘Oh, Mr. Arnold! let me stop you one minute. Baines tells me you have been two hours coming. What would dear Johnnie like,—fish, or chicken, or only pudding? it is all ready.’

‘All ready,’ repeated the Vicar, looking fondly on the sweet, eager face, flushed with pity and eagerness; ‘what business have you to know anything of puddings, or chickens, Lady Duthoyte?’

‘What right? that of being a woman, to be sure! Dear Mr. Arnold, I am so glad you are a little like yourself again, can laugh at me again.’

‘Yes, we are both more like ourselves now. Leaving the scene of all his hopes has made my boy realize what this accident has cost him; but he is better now—now that it has been realized. And if one drive has been long enough for *his* repining, am I to go on doing so for endless days and nights?’

‘But,’ said Lady Duthoyte, after a little pause, ‘we must not forget how hungry he may be all this time. Fish? yes, I thought I remembered that he liked it; I will send some up, and then, perhaps, later in the afternoon, I may come and sit with him a little.’

‘Oh, but Lord Duthoyte will want you; you must not let us disarrange any of your ordinary plans.’

‘Harry is out for the day, so I am quite free.

In the evening we are engaged, I am sorry to say ; I wanted to stay at home, but Harry thought as the people we are going to are not quite of our set—a nasty word, but I don't know a better—though very worthy, good sort of people, you would be far less likely to feel slighted by my absence than the Clarksons.'

'Oh, yes ! indeed you must never think of thus changing any arrangement on our account. What can we want more ? John's room, with its pictures, flowers, and nosegays, is quite a little Crystal Palace. We have interest enough provided for us for days.'

'Oh, but you will want a show-woman sometimes ; but there—I am only keeping you, when I said I would not stop you one minute ;' and she went down on her domestic errand, stopping the footman on his way, to make quite sure that the invalid's dinner was as perfect and tempting as skill and taste could make it.

One week thus passed away very pleasantly—as pleasantly, that is, as such a time could pass, to both father and son. The splendour, the taste around him, roused and pleased the boy ; and Antoinette's soft, cheerful voice, lively interesting talk, eased and cheered, even made gay, many an otherwise weary hour. She read to him, chatted with him, played and sang to him. Knowing the boy to be fond of music, though he knew nothing of its practice or theory, she had had her smaller pianoforte moved into his room—she even drew beside him, and gave him one or two practical lessons in water-colours. But there was another side to the picture

all this time ; frequent visits from Mr. Willis, and one or two painful trials of the extent of the injury, and subsequent consultations between this surgeon and others of like eminence, whom Lord Duthoyte insisted on calling in.

Happily, all came to nearly the same opinion, and, more happily, recommended exactly the same course of treatment, namely, perfect rest ; how long this was to be persevered in, one surgeon did strongly differ from Mr. Willis and the others ; he would not be talked out of his own original, unbiassed opinion, that the boy being, as he had seen at a glance, of an equable, cheerful nature, loss of health otherwise consequent on such sudden loss of air and exercise might be spared him ; and this evil, and its reaction on the injured part averted, he did not see himself why one year, instead of two, might not restore him to some degree of liberty.

‘What was your son’s intended profession?’ he asked in a brisk professional tone, as he concluded an opinion that so cheered his hearer.

‘The army.’

‘By choice?’

‘Oh, yes ; it had been the desire of years.’

‘Glad to hear it ; never let it die out. Never let him give it up ; fan it—keep it alive ; go on making him prepare for it. Best thing possible for such a patient to have an object in life ; if there is not an object he cares for already, his friends must try and make one. You are very happy in having one ready at hand.’

‘But,’ said Mr. Arnold, doggedly, ‘nothing shall induce me so to delude my poor son.’

‘Delude ! pooh, nonsense, my good sir ! Between ourselves—I can’t differ openly from men so far ahead of me in the profession—my own private opinion is, that if kept well in body, and amused in mind, in one year he will be about again, safe and sound !’ and he struck his hand upon the table to enforce his words. And although this was but the opinion of one man against four, and that one the least eminent of them all, it is wonderful what a comfort it was to Mr. Arnold, and what a life to Johnnie, to whom he felt authorized to report it—of course concealing none, perhaps unconsciously magnifying the many reasons which forbade their thinking of such happiness as more than just within the limits of possibility, not of probability.

‘Oh but, papa, only just to have such a little hope as that makes all the difference ; still something to live and learn for. Papa, you must work me a great deal harder now than you did before I went away ; at Eltham, we worked all but eight hours a day.’

‘And you want to be worked eight hours a day at home, Johnnie ?’ said the Vicar, smiling.

‘Why, no ; not quite, I think,’ answered the boy, on further consideration ; ‘but then there will be no drill to interrupt, no cricket to make it seem hard, and not so much noise, so I shall get over the preparation twice as quickly.’

‘And you will have more individual attention.’

‘Yes ; it used to be a great bore to have a lesson quite ready, and then have to wait till other boys had done, and the proper time was come to show it up.’

‘Well, Johnnie, I will get you on to the best of

my ability ; but you must remember that there is but the barest chance of all your pains and preparation ever availing you in the way you hope.'

'Yes, I know. But it is a good thing to have the least little bit of hope to make one learn. I don't wonder now that Robert never cared to learn or get on with Mr. Wyatt, with no hope of ever making any use of it. Oh, papa, after all, my trouble is nothing by the side of his !'

This was John's last day in town. Sir Hector, Lady Agnes, and Sophy came in to say good-bye ; and after they were gone came Robert, his first visit, and one undertaken now without even Sophy's knowledge, for John's room not being on the ground-floor he must be carried up to see him, and this was a humiliation the boy would never face in any house but his father's. It cost him a great effort to come, but he would do many a thing for Johnnie Arnold he would have done for no one else, though the Vicar judged him rightly in leaving his son's side as soon as he heard who the visitor was.

Till Robert was settled and the men gone, there was an awkward silence ; to both boys there was something even more embarrassing than sad in their common helplessness. Robert was the first to speak, with full heart.

'Dear John ! I little thought you would ever come to this.'

'Nor did I,' said John, and another silence followed, broken in upon by other matters ; nor did the two boys venture again upon the comparison filling the mind of each. But when Robert went downstairs, to pay a promised visit to Netta, and

Netta was detained for a few minutes elsewhere, the Vicar was the first to join him.

‘This is very kind of you,’ he said, sitting down beside him.

‘I could not let him go without seeing him,’ answered Robert, for the first time approaching the subject with the Vicar alone.

‘He is not much changed yet.’

‘He will be soon enough,’ said Robert, a little bitterly; ‘but,’ with sudden energy, ‘it cannot, shall not end like mine; if I, who have known nothing better all my life, can only just bear it, what will he do?’

The Vicar half smiled.

‘Ah! I know; bear it *well*. Yes; how patient and sweet-tempered he is. But I cannot bear it for him; he is too good to be flung on one side as I am, and—and *I* needed something to make me think and care to do right, but he was only too good for any one as it was.’

‘Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,’ said the Vicar, into whose heart these words had of late often stolen whilst watching by his son, and stolen, oh, how soothingly. Then, after a pause, with a sad smile, ‘But, Robert, I have no business to answer you in this way; I am only passing on to you what sometimes comforts me, but as yet it does seem as hard to me as to yourself that he, of all my sons, should thus be laid by. I find the faith and patience I once preached to you are very hard to gain’—Robert looked up—‘not the less to be striven after,’ the Vicar added, ‘and Johnnie himself is my best teacher; dear fellow, the dis-

appointment of all his hopes seems impotent to sour him.'

'It maddens me,' said Robert, fretfully. 'What am I to do now?—what have I to live for?'

'For ten persons nearer to you than my dear boy,' said Mr. Arnold, 'and, if God will, for him too; there is some hope this may be but a passing trouble, and however it may end, we shall have to thank you for the happiest six months of his life. He was so happy at school,—the whole school seemed his friend!'

It was a proud happy smile now on the Vicar's lips, and Robert looked up in amaze. 'Ah! Robert, that pleasure was our Father's sending, this pain is His! We are in His hand; it is His doing. That, after all, is the only true source, in any trouble, of peace and patience.'

The next day the two travelled back to Aggesden, where Mrs. Arnold had undergone no little misery in her husband's absence; but when he was as father and mother to the lad in one, where was the use of her deserting her many little ones at home, to go to the son she could not aid nor comfort better than he was already being aided and comforted? The cares and struggles of her life had seemed to many to have beaten down Anna Arnold before them, but now it was shown that, unperceived and unnoticed, they had at least taught her great patience and fortitude.

Mr. Hughes had provided for his neighbour's duty in his absence, and was one of the first to come over now to express in words the sympathy of his heart. He brought his young brother-in-law, Peter

Lee, with him, a boy Mr. Arnold had never much liked ; and now all through Mr. Hughes's visit, his attention was ever wandering to what was passing between Peter Lee and his son.

Their meeting had been awkward and constrained, and now Peter sat beside John's couch, even more silent than at first, answering his questions by monosyllables, starting no common subject himself. Why Mr. Arnold felt so oppressed and irritated by the whole visit he could hardly say, but certainly he did not breathe freely again till the two brothers, old and young, were gone.

He did not then sift the feeling to the bottom, other things occupied his attention, but the source of the irritation did lie here ; the Hughes' were in his own mind closely connected with John's accident, not of course the Rector of Marshland himself, but his wife's great, stout, overbearing brother, whom he had always fancied a bully ; and after this visit, and the awkward feeling manifest between the two boys, he unconsciously felt more certain than ever that he was the injurer. And for the sake of saving such a boy's roughness—it might be brutality—from exposure, John's life-long prospects had been in all probability destroyed.

Here let us speak out. The boy had given his word, and, now the evil was beyond remedy, was right to keep it. But if at the time the accident occurred, John Arnold had had the slightest idea of its serious consequences, nothing—no feeling of boyish honour—should have induced him to make the promise, as he had done. The *name* of the injurer was indeed his to give or conceal, but the

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injury itself he was bound at once to confess. Oh, what misery, anxiety, expense they could ill afford, which pinched and straitened them for many a day, would his family have been spared (setting aside the lad's own sufferings, bodily and mental alike), if when the evil was done John had told his father—a father he might have felt so sure would never tempt his son to break his word, even to satisfy his own natural desire to know every particular of so fatal an occurrence.

But John had not told, never thought of telling: he had promised to conceal both the hurt and its cause, and so he thought he had no choice, but as long as his limbs would carry him to bear up. But when the promise had been given, he had—and so had he who had done the evil—this great excuse, that neither ever dreamed that the fall would cost him more than a day or two's discomfort. Poor boys! how should they ever have dreamt that one angry push should cost more pain, or have borne any more lasting consequence, than the many which had previously passed between them?—at least on one side.

A week had slowly passed since John's return to Aggesden. Hitherto he had borne up bravely and well. Mabel thought, if he would but get up, he would be quite well, but as he would lie down, often brought her books or work and sat by his side. The lessons in Miss Storey's schoolroom had never been interrupted, but the Vicar had found an accumulation of business to which to attend, on his return, mostly connected with the school, where Mr. Pattison, the new master, had arrived in his

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absence, and thus, being unable also to give up all at once his tender, unceasing care of John, had too much upon his hands to think of his old scholars. Harry had been taken pity on by his mother, since his father had been away, for a couple of hours every morning ; but Frank had been left to his own devices.

The meeting between the brothers had been quiet, but affectionate, and many a quiet unobtrusive service did Frank do for John. A strange change had this fortnight made in the sturdy, fearless, and headstrong boy. He sat apart, doing nothing (this was no new thing) ; but molesting and teasing no one. Outwardly his tone to John was not more gentle or friendly than of old ; but Mary (who alone had eyes to observe, the father and mother could as yet think of nothing but John) often noticed how Frank sat and looked at him till he turned away, as if his brother's helpless state was a sight that cut him to the heart. She noticed, too, the little inconspicuous attentions we have mentioned. But she could not follow him further. The two brothers, at John's especial request, still shared the same room, though their old bedroom was now exchanged for what had been Bridget's schoolroom, and there, how Frank waited on John, anticipating his wants ; how carefully he tended him ; what pains he took to put within reach all he could possibly want, as also never to bring his helplessness needlessly before him—no one could see.

And no one but Mary noticed him much about the house : how heavy and listless his tread had grown—how little he ate—how little he cared to

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enjoy himself : how the dark lines under his eyes deepened day by day ; and there had been far too little confidence or sympathy between the brother and sister, for her to say a word to him upon the subject.

So things had gone on for rather more than a week, when for the second time, Peter Lee came over on his pony to enquire after John.

‘He wouldn’t come in, papa. I did ask him,’ said Harry, as if afraid that he alone having spoken to Peter, the immediate departure of the visitor might be laid to any lack of hospitality on his part.

‘I am glad of it,’ said Mr. Arnold, hastily. ‘I cannot bear the sight of the boy.’ (John was not in the room.)

‘My dear Frank, why?’ asked his wife, surprised.

‘I always connect him with all John’s misery,’ said the father, forgetting Frank and Anna’s presence. ‘I feel sure that day at Marshlands had something to do with the accident, if accident it were.’

‘That he did it?’ said Mrs. Arnold, as if shrinking back in imagination from the perpetrator ; ‘I always hoped no one did it ; to think——’

‘Papa, do you mean you think Peter did it?’ said Frank, suddenly.

‘I have no right to say what I think, nor has any one any right to ask me,’ answered Mr. Arnold sternly, feeling how incautious he had been.

Frank sat still a few minutes, his mouth working : suddenly he rose.

‘Papa,’ said he, in a firm clear voice, ‘I did it, not Peter.’

Mrs. Arnold almost shrieked. Her husband took

no more heed of the words than if they had not been spoken.

‘Papa,’ repeated Frank, ‘I did it. I made him promise not to tell. It is all my fault—all.’

Still Mr. Arnold sat as one who did not, or would not, hear.

‘Oh, papa, speak! Turn me out of the house—kill me!—only do something!’ the boy groaned.

Mrs. Arnold burst into tears—wild, hysterical tears. These did what his son’s words had failed to do,—roused her husband; but, ‘You are distressing your mother, Frank; you had better go away,’ was all he said, even then.

Frank did go—dashed away—stood irresolute in the hall one moment, then turned upstairs.

‘Oh Frank! Frank! to think his own brother should have done it!’ sobbed the mother.

‘My dear; I only wonder I ever thought of any one else,’ said the Vicar, quietly.

‘Oh, Frank, how can you take it thus? it—it—breaks my heart,’ and her tears flowed again.

There were some minutes of silence, then, timid, awe-struck Anna, rose and said, gently, as if half afraid of the sound of her own voice,

‘Papa, may I go up to him?’

‘Who?’

‘Frank.’

‘Oh yes, if he is upstairs. I did not send him there, nor do I wish him to stay: he is free to go where he likes; don’t let him think otherwise.’

Anna went,—knocked. No answer; opened the door. Frank was on his knees, at his chest of

drawers ; his jacket off, and this, with other clothing, strewn about him.

‘Oh—Anna,’ he said, in a cold, chilling voice, ‘I am glad you are come. I rather wanted to see some one. I am going away—for good ; don’t stare, don’t be stupid ; you will be able to tell them, when they care to know.’

‘Oh, Frank, what do you mean ?’

‘That I have been nothing but trouble and vexation and disappointment to them both, all my life, and wont cost them another penny.’

‘Oh, Frank, do we cost them anything? I mean—’

‘Not such as you, but I—. Don’t you see? He has quite given me up ; I am not worth scolding, any notice—far less comforting.’ And Frank threw himself on the ground, his face on the floor, and sobbed aloud.

‘Frank, dear Frank, we do all love you. I am sure papa does ; only he can only think of Johnnie just now.’

‘I don’t want him to think of any one else. I am sure I have no right to expect him to think of me ; but I did hope he would have knocked me down—done something.’

‘Oh, Frank, how can you?’ cried Anna, shocked.

‘How can I? Oh, I could do anything to make him care enough for me to be angry! But’—recovering his calmness—‘he gives me up at last. I can’t complain—no wonder I have worn him out. I wont stand in your way now ; I may as well go at once. Good-bye, Anna!’

‘Good-bye?—Frank, I don’t understand,’ said the bewildered girl.

‘I will make it clear. I am going to run away from home.’

‘Surely that would be very wicked!’

‘Would it? I don’t know—don’t much care. I thought it was very wicked of me not to tell this out, the minute papa came home; but it seems now it wasn’t—at least not wicked enough for papa to care. It can’t be wickeder to run away, and fight my own way in the world, than to cripple my brother for life.’

‘But, Frank, you did not mean to do *that*.’

‘*Mean it?*’ repeated her brother, shrinking back indignantly, ‘could you ever think I did? No, we had quarrelled—oh dear! oh dear!—because he had taken my handkerchief by mistake. I snatched it from him, and thinking he was going to snatch it back again, pushed him away; his foot caught, he fell down *there*.’

‘Oh, Frank! In this very room?’

‘In this very room. Oh, why did not I die first?’ And Frank hid his face in his hands, and rocked to and fro in his agony.

Anna was quiet for some time; then put her arms round his neck, and whispered, ‘Frank, it has done some good—made you love him.’

‘Much my love is worth, when it is I who have cost him everything he longed for.’

‘Oh, I wish Johnnie were here; he could tell you what I mean. Frank, you will not leave him—he could not do without you.’

‘He does care for me a little? Oh yes; because

he is too good to bear malice, and I—I bore him malice six whole months.’

‘Frank!’

‘I did. Not the very first day, I am glad of that; but very soon, and—and never tried to stop it. Didn’t papa tell me, when I pushed Mabel down, harm would come of my roughness some day? Oh, why was he so gentle with me? He told me the devil was in me. Why did he not beat it out of me?’

‘Dear Frank, this is all chance. I don’t see that your knocking Johnnie down that day was any worse than your doing so three or four days after he came home, when he only got up and knocked you down in return.’

And here even little Anna had got to the root of the matter. Men may judge of sins by their consequences; happily there is another Judge, that judgeth righteous judgment.

‘Frank, only promise me you will not go; it would so frighten mamma, and she does look so ill already.’

‘She does not care for *me*!’

‘Oh yes, she cares for us all; not quite so much for you and me, perhaps, as the others’ (Oh, Mrs. Arnold!) ‘but she does care. And Frank, what should *I* do without you?’ And she caressed him.

He let her head lie on his shoulder, as he had let Mabel’s lie nine months ago. Oh, that he could but wipe those nine months out of his life and begin afresh! How he would now have trampled down the first spark of jealousy against his brother!

‘Oh, Frank, I have not learnt my lessons. I

must go,' cried Anna, starting up suddenly ; 'but you will promise me you will not run away ?'

He shook his head.

'Do, Frank ! Poor papa has so much trouble to bear already.'

'He will be glad to get rid of me. I shall be one off his hands.'

'Oh no, Frank ! How I wish you had heard how he talked to me when I was so very naughty, just before the holidays—how, as we grow older, we may repent our passions, but God will not let us repair them, to teach us to be more careful another time. That must be why He has let this dreadful thing happen now,' ended the little girl, reverently.

'You do promise me ?' she added, after a moment's pause.

'Oh, Anna, I don't know. Perhaps so ;' and with this his little sister was forced to be content.

Yet she lingered on the bottom stair. She felt that, in the schoolroom, out of the way, she could not be sure of Frank for a moment. She was convinced his running away would be wicked ; would cause, also, fresh grief and trouble. She hoped it was not dishonourable—that Frank would forgive her ! She called 'papa !' from where she stood.

'Anna ! come here ;' from the dining-room.

'Oh, papa, please come here for one minute.'

Mr. Arnold, who was reading to John, little thinking of sense or words, complied.

'Some fresh trouble !' he almost groaned, seeing her perplexed and tearful face.

'Papa, I'm not quite sure whether I ought to

tell or not. I hope I am not doing wrong ; but Frank is so wretched, because he says you do not even care enough for him to scold him, he says he means to run away.'

'I cannot take it in yet,' answered the father.

'Oh, you do not know how miserable he is, papa ; but he would do anything *you* told him. If you would only tell him not to run away, I am sure he wouldn't, and then I should feel safe, and could go to my lessons.'

'Tell him I forbid his doing so, then. Stay, I will go to him. No, I cannot yet. Say to-morrow I will hear it all.'

Anna carried the message faithfully. Frank was far too miserable to reproach her. Besides, as she had rightly said, it was a comfort to have any command to obey. And so another wretched night must pass, before he could feel in any way forgiven.



CHAPTER IV.

HARDNESS AND MERCY.

Some here know the weight of an uncommunicated sin. They know how it lies like ice upon the heart. They know how dreadful a thing the sense of hypocrisy is. In that craving of the heart which gives the system of the Confessional its dangerous power, there is something far more profound than any sneer can fathom. It is not the desire to sin again that makes men long to unburden their consciences; but it is the yearning to be true which lies at the bottom even of the most depraved hearts; to appear what they are, and to lead a false life no longer.

F. W. ROBERTSON.

AS tea-time drew near, he was still missing. 'This will never do,' said Mr. Arnold to himself, irritated by what, had not his other son so wholly pre-occupied him, would have touched and moved him; and he went up just to look into Frank's room and say, in a constrained, unnaturally calm voice, 'Frank, you must *come* down, and *stay* down; I cannot have John needlessly excited or alarmed by your absence.' Cruel words, but indeed the Vicar knew not that they were so, only that he could not yet face any further explanation, could not trust himself to hear what his son might yet have to tell him.

But this very (that is *apparent*) abhorrence of him was a comfort to Frank; the boy found, as many older and wiser than himself have done before

him, how far easier hatred is to bear than indifference. He took this as a punishment, and as such welcomed it: and, going down, felt almost glad the few words his father said to him in the course of the evening were as bare and chilly as they were. It was with a sort of stern, self-revengeful satisfaction that he now thought of the long night, even the bearing up before John which he had once felt would be a torture he could not endure.

The next morning the Vicar went downstairs an altered man. Shocked, humbled, beyond measure distressed at the revengeful implacability of the day before. Groaning in himself to think how he had let this temper master him, as he had often, before this, punished Frank for allowing his to do so. He, a father, moreover a minister of His, who had come to seek and to save that which was lost, to open a way for the weary and heavy-laden to find rest. He was quite relieved when breakfast was over and he could follow Frank into the hall, and saying, 'Now, Frank,' lead the way into the study.

Frank followed him, as gladly. Oh! to have all this miserable burden off his mind! to be hated, despised, pointed at, as he deserved.

'Now, then, tell me all. But first—Frank, however bad it may be, remember I forgive you, quite. You have suffered enough, I am sure.'

How different were these few words from the tone of last night! Frank looked up quickly, but he did not wish to be so quickly pardoned, would rather have expiated his deed in his own eyes, by far worse suffering than any he had yet undergone.

So to this promise of forgiveness he made no answer, but gave, in reply to the first permission, a full and minute account of every incident of that fatal Thursday morning. This need not be repeated here : only on one part he dwelt, that the original subject of quarrel had been his taunting John with their father's favouritism.

When the whole tale was told, Frank stood still, and so did Mr. Arnold.

'Then,' he said at last, 'you no more meant to hurt him, than when you have pushed him off twenty times before?'

'Oh, no ! I have often been twice as angry with him, and hurt—at least, meant to hurt ten times as much as then ;—if his foot hadn't caught—' but Frank's voice choked.

'That was God's will,' said his father, quietly, 'not yours. *Your* offence is nothing to what I feared ; I was very hard upon you last night : only—oh, Frank ! I try in vain to submit to the greatest trial I have ever known ! I can only number over and over again all the little things that might have saved him !'

'And one other thing, papa,' said Frank, so softened as to be glad to excuse himself, a thing he had never cared to do before ; 'if we had had the very least idea anything would have come of it more than his having that pain for a day or two, indeed we would have spoken out at once.'

'I believe it.'

'Only when I had kept it back so long,—it seemed as if I could not tell, as if I could not bear

your 'all hating me—but it's a great deal easier to bear that than the deceiving you.'

'You scarcely deceived me. John had a right to withhold me from making inquiries that could profit no one. You told as soon as another was accused. I do not mean but that you ought to have told me when I returned, but I can understand the shame that kept you back, and—excuse it.'

'Oh, papa! don't excuse it!—I mean, be angry with me, do something to me.'

'What can I do? If the misery of these weeks and John's helpless state ever before your eyes, does not teach you to tame your temper, nothing *I* can say or do will ever do so.'

'Then—you do give me up?' and Frank sank down despairingly.

'Give you up?'

'Don't think me worth punishing.'

'What have I to punish? A few hasty words, a hasty push, both of which you have said and done twenty times in my own presence, and *I* have said and done nothing. Why should I punish you for either now? only because the consequences, this time, have been suffering to yourself and others, which will punish you for years and keep your fault ever before you.'

Frank almost groaned.

'My poor boy,' said his father, gently, 'you judge yourself too hardly; this injury was truly an *accident*; you were the means, it is true, but the involuntary means. Your secret is safe with mamma and myself, and little Anna you know too well to think, even child as she is, she will betray you.'

‘Papa,’ said Frank, raising his head, ‘I do not want it to be a secret. I want all to know how it was done. I have had to feel a hypocrite and keep away from them long enough. I was going to ask if, when they are all together, you would tell them—after dinner, perhaps. John wont be there then ; it might hurt him.’

‘But *you* will be.’

‘I want to be ; I can bear it. I *will* bear it,’ said the boy passionately, clenching his hand.

Mr. Arnold stood in thought for a minute.

‘Frank,’ he said, then, ‘I take you at your word ; your feeling is a true and healthy one, that a public trespass, such as this has proved, is not heartily repented of unless publicly avowed. But indeed it is a step that will, if possible, be even more painful for me to take than for you to bear.’

‘I *will* bear it,’ said Frank, calmly ; ‘thank you.’

‘And now, Frank, let us part good friends, understanding one another. Poor boy ! God has at last taken your temper into His hands, and inflicted, on a comparatively trifling exhibition of it, a penalty more enduring, harder to bear, than any to which I could have felt justified in subjecting you for the most violent outburst of it imaginable. Truly, man’s ways are not God’s ways ! Frank, if you indeed make this the lesson it may be, and turn your fearlessness and steadfastness on your duties, instead of your self-will, it may be that even your mother and myself may live to bless the trial which has as yet cost us such bitter sorrow.’

‘Father, I will try—am trying,’ said Frank, with

a quiet depth of earnestness, new to him in peaceful moments.

‘And may God bless your efforts, Frank,’ answered his father, his voice trembling with emotion. ‘And now we had better part; I will go in to read to John. You will be glad to think. To-morrow we will begin lessons again; I have neglected you too long already.’

The Vicar did take Frank at his word, though his courage, if not his son’s, well nigh failed before the time came. John, as yet, had his dinner sent to him to the drawing-room; he was moved there as being the brighter, pleasanter room, after breakfast, and there generally lay till bed-time. After grace, as the children were preparing to disperse, their father said—

‘Stay; I want to speak to you all.’

All turned back, prepared by his grave tone for ‘something more wretched than ever,’ as poor Anna said afterwards.

‘I am speaking at Frank’s desire. We have not hitherto known how John’s accident happened; he has told me—he wishes you all to know. On the Thursday before John went away to school, he and Frank quarrelled—rather Frank quarrelled with him—as they were getting up. Frank pushed him down, but John would not have been hurt more than for the moment, if his foot had not caught in the carpet, and caused him to fall with all his weight on his back. Now mark me! Frank did it; but he was but the instrument it pleased God to employ to bring this great sorrow upon us—one, I trust, that will teach us all gentleness and forbearance,

and draw us all closer together. You may go now.'

His tone had been low and clear ; he had even named Johnnie without faltering, but his face was very white, his manner very constrained. Bridget could not bear to look at him, to see the wrinkles the last few weeks had set round the firm, good-humoured mouth—the many streaks of grey gradually creeping in amongst his thick brown hair. The younger children crept out of the room in awed silence. But one being this confession restored to Frank—at least for the time—his mother. She went up to him, knelt down beside him, put her arms round his heavy, upright head—the head he *would* not let the pain and shame make him hide from others, and thus save himself one drop of either,—kissed his white, cold cheeks, and whispered, 'Oh, my poor boy, what must you have gone through !'

And then the Vicar went out, Mary and Anna before him, and left mother and son alone, as his sons and daughters had once left himself and that very mother alone.



CHAPTER V.

WILL HE ENDURE?

O God, I am so young, so young
 I am not used to tears at nights
 Instead of slumber—nor to prayer
 With shaken lips and hands outwrung :
 Thou knowest all my prayings were
 ‘I bless Thee, God, for past delights—
 Thank God!’

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

AFTER this, another month passed by quietly. Gradually it was becoming a natural and familiar sight, to see the once merriest, most active member of the large household ever in one place. Bridget ceased to listen for his merry whistle, learnt to bear to see his fair, cheerful face grow a little paler, a little more thoughtful day by day. To watch the dawning of the sweet, wistful expression which marks long endurance, whether in body or mind, at least when such continued trial is patiently borne.

It was a great comfort to Frank to have part of his time again taken off his hands, and he did his lessons now with a careful doggedness but little heart. In fact, as yet, he could not rally : if he and Harry, or himself and Anna, had had a long walk, a nutting expedition, a game at cricket,—to come in and see John’s faint, wistful smile, turned all his pleasure into bitterness and self-reproach.

Then, as would sometimes happen in spite of all his care, he found himself talking on such subjects before John ; and then his silence or forced interest were bitterer reproaches than any outspoken ones. Mr. Arnold saw this ; but what could he do ? To send Frank away for a time to cheer and divert him, was what he longed to do ; but he had nowhere to send him. If Sir Hector had been in England, he would almost have asked him to afford the change of scene and companions that his eldest son so much needed to restore the balance of his energies and spirits. But Sir Hector, Lady Agnes, Robert, and Sophy, had started for Dresden as soon as the London season was over ; and there Sophy was enjoying the best masters and the best schools of art. Her second daughter could never be the attractive beauty her eldest had been, so her talents must occupy the place her sister's beauty had done. Lady Agnes did not see how much liked the quiet, good-humoured, sensible girl already was, by those whose admiration was worth gaining.

Lord Duthoyte, in a letter about parish business, had said he hoped to see Mr. Arnold at Bury Duthoyte before they returned to London after Christmas ; and so the Vicar was forced to console himself with thinking that whenever the real invitation came, he would ask to be allowed to bring Frank with him. Meanwhile he did what he could for the boy himself. He made him his walking companion, when very likely indeed each would have preferred being alone ; and tried to counteract his morbid shrinking from mentioning or showing

any interest in active pursuits before John, who, poor fellow, must learn to bear such things, and the sooner the better.

The time came round for the last Aggesden cricket-match again. So much delicacy and sympathy exists when kindness has brought it out, under the rough, stolid exterior of an English labourer, that the match which was to have been held the day their Vicar's son was brought home maimed, they had, at the suggestion of Roger Stokes, unanimously postponed *sine die*. Even this, the climax of the whole season, they would equally have foregone, had not Mr. Arnold, full of gratitude for such consideration to his darling, positively forbidden any such thing, and even insisted on Frank playing as usual.

'You would wish it yourself, Johnnie, I am sure.'

'O yes, papa, he *must* play,' answered John, with his bright smile.

The practising and preliminary excitement roused and cheered Frank as nothing had done yet, and threw him so much off his ordinary wearisome guard, that for one half-hour after dinner he talked of nothing else, so that at last even the Vicar was glad when he and the other children turned out of doors.

'My boy, how well you bear it all?' he could not help saying, turning to John, by whose side he was sitting. The seat next to John's had unconsciously become the father's natural place by right, whenever he was in the general sitting-room. Even little Mabel picked up her toys and slipped quietly

out of the chair by John's side, at her father's entrance.

'Bear it?', repeated Johnnie now, trying to keep his lips firm and to smile.

'It *is* hard; but words only make it harder—so we will get to your Greek,' said his father, feeling he had needlessly distressed him, and that more words would but increase his pain.

'I—I don't think I can do my Greek. Oh, papa, I am *not* bearing it, cannot bear it. Oh, why did not I die!' *

'My poor boy!'

'Don't pity me. Oh!—' Two heart-breaking tearless sobs. 'I can't bear it; never shall be able.'

Mr. Arnold made no answer this time, except by a caress: such feelings had far better have free vent than be stifled longer within the boy's own heart.

'No one cares for me now, as they used.'

'Oh, John!' said the Vicar, his sense of justice stronger even than his pity, 'you would not say that in calmer moments. All do all that they can, and would willingly do ten times as much for you if they could, they love you so.'

'But you—'

'I?—my poor boy, have I ever hurt you?' asked the father, not indignantly, but his love so firm and bracing a minute before, now full of sorrow and tenderness; 'ah, I am but a rough man after all, and cannot enter into cares and trials as mamma can.'

'Oh, not that!—no, you are only too—too kind. You don't know how wicked I am.'

‘Dear John, lying here makes such morbid fancies grow up unawares. No one could have borne such a trial more patiently, more uncomplainingly than you have done.’

‘But I am not bearing it really ; you don’t know how cross and vexed I often am, and then I seem cheerful, and cheat you all ; you think me good. Oh, I am so wicked, it frightens me.’

‘What frightens you ? Your secret murmurings against the will of God ?’

‘Not only that, — you will hate me. I—I cannot bear to see you — making Frank your friend instead of me—walking with him just as I used—’

John broke down, nor could his father speak for a minute or two ; this was a trouble of which, in his moments of deepest depression, he had never even dreamt.

‘It seems so hard to see him take my place.’

Still Mr. Arnold sat silent. Oh, what a prospect this confession opened ! His John jealous !—Oh, to think any affliction could so have changed him !

‘Papa, I have shocked you very much. I am so sorry ; but I could not keep it to myself any longer.’

‘I almost think, John, it was better you should tell me,’ said the Vicar, slowly, constrained to speak.

‘Oh, papa ! don’t take it so,’ cried Johnnie, in his anxiety trying to rise, and then sinking back with an involuntary cry that roused Mr. Arnold at once. He knelt down beside the boy, within reach, and said gently,

‘Dear Johnnie ! I am not angry, only so very, very sorry, it has pleased God such a temptation as this should ever come near you. If I can help—’

‘Oh, no, no, papa : I never meant that ! I don’t want you to alter one bit ! I could not bear to see you change towards him. I did not tell you for that reason, but—because I could not bear it any longer alone. I could not bear you should think me cheerful and patient, when I was really jealous and repining.’

‘Not *jealous*, John,’ said the father, jealously, himself ; ‘it hurts and tries you to see me try to make Frank companionable ; but you would not have it otherwise. That may be repining, but not jealousy.’

‘But once or twice, at the time, I *have* wished it otherwise,—not afterwards, not when I think it over. Oh, papa ! if I could but walk with you again, only once ;’ and Johnnie turned away his face and wept.

Mr. Arnold did not try to check one tear ; each tear that fell left relief and solace behind it.

At last John turned back. ‘Oh, papa ! I never meant to let you know,—to trouble you—’ breaking off with a flicker of his old smile.

‘Johnnie, you must *always* let me know such things. If such feelings don’t find some vent they only ferment into sourness and bitterness within us. Now, when I am cross and vexed I take a quick walk, and walk my ill-humour off ; but when you are sad and tried, you must still lie on in the same dull, changeless scene, and so you must, instead of walking it off, talk it away with your father, who,

my dear boy, longs as much as even you can do to have one of our old walks together again.'

Johnnie lay a few minutes in silence. 'That is it, papa ; if I could only walk, do something ; but I have nothing to do but lie and think. One can't read all day.'

'Yes, John, you are right ; you want change of occupation. When Robert comes back we must see if Hall could make you such a table as his. I am sure Miss Storey would give you some drawing lessons, and there would be a never-failing source of amusement,—but till then I don't see why all these weeks your hands should be idle. I advise you to learn to knit,—or—'

'Oh, papa !'

'I do, indeed. Knit old nurse a shawl by Christmas-day. How delighted she would be !'

'Oh, papa, don't !' said John, much distressed.

'Why ?'

'It would be so girlish, so——'

Ah ! sickness was changing even John a little, bringing some of its touchiness and tenacity along with it. In his cheerful, healthy days, John, if kept a prisoner to the house for a while, would have taken to such an employment as a good joke, and not been at all ashamed of it, or of taking interest in such a piece of work.

'Well, Johnnie,' said the Vicar, cheerfully, 'I don't yet despair of Nurse Moore having a good warm neckerchief to wear over her shoulders before Christmas, and made by those very hands, 'for Satan finds some mischief still, for idle hands to do ;' or for 'hands' read 'minds,' and the old lines are just as true.'

But John could only turn away his face, so thoroughly was he upset. 'There, it is half-past two, and I must be off; we will leave the Greek until to-morrow. I shall not let what you have said make the least difference in my conduct towards Frank. I do not think I ought. But I do feel for you in seeing it, and cannot wonder it makes you unhappy, although in your heart of hearts you know all the time my John is far more precious to me than ever he was. Good-bye till tea, then; I shall tell them you wish for a little quiet till Mary is ready for your French at four.'

Coming in again, the Vicar found the lesson was over, tea ready, and Johnnie lying, poor fellow, in his old place, a little quiet and pale, but answering his father's glance with an entreating smile.

'All your lessons over for to-day?' asked the Vicar, making this excuse for going to his side, and then, bending down to give him a kiss, catching sight of the wools and knitting-needles on the table behind him.

'Why, papa, one would think that you and Johnnie were two young lovers,' said Mrs. Arnold, with a smile.

'Well, *young*, certainly, I can't pretend to be, but lovers we have been these thirteen years; haven't we, Johnnie? and I, at least, have no intention of ever being anything else, however old I may grow.'

John knew what these words meant, and met his father's smile with one that showed he did so. And then he might well lie still, and wonder how any lot seemed hard with such a father.

'Ah,' said the Vicar, as, John's wants sup-

plied by his own hands, he took his place, 'I met Lady Merivale, and she told me the Merivales have been kept at Dresden a week longer than they had intended by Lady Agnes being very ill—some slight attack of fever, which, however, threatened to be serious; but they leave for Heidelberg to-morrow, and, she hopes, will be in England again by November. Sophy seems coming out quite an artist; it will be a real treat to see that girl's sketches of such a tour.'

Almost as he spoke, Marianne entered with a letter, 'the telegray boy, please, sir,' had brought from Massing.

'Eh!—what?' cried the Vicar, tearing the official sheet open—'oh! poor things!'

'Who?—what?' cried Mrs. Arnold. In unbusiness-like houses a telegraphic message always carries with it fear of some disaster.

'The Merivales. Poor Hector!'

'What! the boy?'

'No, I was thinking of her husband. Lady Agnes is very ill; in fact, I fear, before now, dead. Poor Hector, and those eleven children!' and the Vicar leant back, shading his eyes from the light.

Mrs. Arnold took up the sheet and read—

'Hector Beauchamp Merivale to Francis Arnold.'

'Lady Agnes has had a sudden relapse, and is dying. Break it gently to my daughter, and at the Hall. Don't let Netta think of coming. It will be too late. Will telegraph to Duthoyte to-morrow; so see them, and prepare them for the worst before this, and the children at Eastbourne.'

‘Poor Netta!’ said the quiet English mother; and then leant back in silence also, regretting many an unkind thought, many a harsh judgment, many willing rents to the breach which had so slowly and surely been for the last ten years dividing herself and Lady Agnes more and more.

‘Now, what can I do?’ cried Mr. Arnold, at last, rousing himself; ‘I could catch the mail-train, and be at Duthoyte to-night; or shall I only go to the Hall, and let poor Antoinette have a quiet night before this trouble comes near her. Poor child! that will be best; the suspense till to-morrow’s news less long, less trying—and either herself or Lady Merivale must be left in ignorance.’ And so Mr. Arnold put on his hat, and walked up to the Hall.

Lady Merivale was upstairs, in the simple little sitting-room she seldom left, except to attend the church services, or take a drive on some kind, unobtrusive errand, in her pony-carriage. She was knitting, a book open before her, when her maid told her that Mr. Arnold was at the Hall, and wishing to see her.

‘Show Mr. Arnold up,’ she said, quietly, going on with her work, but laying it aside as he entered, to welcome him, with her retiring, courteous kindness. ‘The lovely moonlight has tempted you out,’ said she, as both seated themselves; ‘I am very glad; I begin to think it time Hector should be in England, and running down now and then to enliven me.’

‘You heard from Sir Hector this morning, I think you said?’ answered Mr. Arnold, hating such a gradual approach to his sad news, but thinking that

Lady Merivale's age justified him, nay, obliged him to use it.

'Yes, still at Dresden ; I was quite glad to hear it ; for really Sophy's first account of her mother's attack made me rather anxious.'

'I have still later news,' said Mr. Arnold, quietly, but able to circumlocute no longer ; 'I am sorry to say, not so good. Lady Agnes has had a relapse—serious enough for your poor son to think it right that his family should be made aware of it at once.'

'Ah ! but Hector is so easily alarmed,' said the old lady.

'I am afraid here, with good reason ; the message was telegraphed, so was not very full ; but indeed her Ladyship was in very serious danger when it was sent.'

Lady Merivale looked intently in the Vicar's face.

'In fact, he wished his family to be prepared for the worst, and seemed utterly cast down.'

'I must go to him,' said she, quietly, and rising as she spoke.

'Dear Lady Merivale, I fear it would be too late—that before now it is all over.'

'She is dead, and you only told me she was ill !'

'Lady Agnes was not dead when the message left Dresden, but unless some unforeseen change has taken place, Sir Hector seemed to wish to prepare us for her being so before now.'

Lady Merivale sat down again, quietly, her hands calmly folded upon her knees.

'May God comfort my poor boy,' she said, softly,

one or two tears trickling down her worn pale cheeks. 'God prepare us all for the like great change—to myself now it cannot be afar off. He knows best, and we must wait the solving of life's riddles till His own good time, or one might well wonder that an old woman whose work has been so long finished should be left, and the mother of so large a family taken. My poor Hector !'

Oh ! how different would be the breaking of such news to the young, happy, life-loving wife and daughter, to this to the Christian whose race was so nearly run, life or death mattered but little ; who was ready at any moment, at her Lord's bidding, to exchange the one for the other.

The Vicar walked home thoughtfully, pondering whether in his own case any length of years could thus still the hot life-blood that made existence so dear, so pleasant and exciting a possession ; as, in spite of every care and sorrow, it still was to himself, middle-aged man as he had now long been.

A far different scene did indeed await him at Duthoyte the next day. Netta's exclamation of joy and surprise, as she looked up from copying a letter of her husband's, her eager inquiries after grand-mamma and all at Aggesden, cut him through and through. And then her cry of anguish at his news, gently as he broke it ; her motionless, speechless grief, the piteous looks she turned upon her husband, as if still child enough to wonder he let so great a blow lift up its hand against her ; the starting up, saying she must go at once ; the bitter sobs when told it was too late ; all this was very, very sad to see.

Then the weary waiting for the telegraph message ; her faint attempts at smiling as she pressed her husband and guest to eat at luncheon ; her impatience for three o'clock, when Lord Duthoyte would be at liberty to drive her to the station to meet the message ; the waiting hour after hour in the little waiting room ; busy, happy parties coming in, chatting, flitting out again ;—all this seemed hour by hour to be crushing Antoinette's life within her, to be turning the blooming, buoyant girl, who had sprung up to greet her old friend's coming, into a worn, faded woman.

The message came at last.

'Mamma died last night at ten o'clock, unconscious, but in little pain, Dr. Fischer says. Papa is quite overcome, but we are all well. She will be buried here on Sunday—she wished it.—S. M.'

Antoinette sat still for a few moments, letting her husband's kind, pitying hand lie unheeded on her shoulder.

'S. M.,' she repeated at last. 'Harry, you will take me to poor Sophy at once ; we will go home and prepare,' and she led the way to their carriage.

And three days later, the young motherless daughter, who had had meanwhile to bear all, think of all, prepare for all, and who had borne and done everything, grave and still, but tearless and composed, heard a voice, a step, on the stair, that had more music in it than any voice or step could ever have again. Ten minutes later, and it was weeping, hysterical, prostrated Sophy whom Antoinette was soothing, tending, caressing ; for her father's sake composed and tearless herself.

CHAPTER VI.

PATIENT ABIDING.

Musing on all my Father's love—
 How sweet it is !
 Methought I heard a voice,
 ' Child, here's a cup ;
 I've made it, drink it up.'
 ' Oh, Father ! dost thou love thy child ?
 Then, why this cup ?'
 ' One day, my child, I said to thee,
 ' See, here's a flower ;'
 One day I brought thee pleasant fruit from a rich tree ;
 How grateful did you seem.
 That flower was mine—
 That fruit was mine—
 This cup is mine.'
 ' Ah, Father ! must it be ?'
 ' Yes, child, it must.'
 ' Then give the needed medicine—
 Be by my side,
 Only thy face don't hide ;
 I'll drink it all—it must be good—
 'Tis Thine.

TIME passed quietly by till winter was come—
 Christmas once more at hand.

' Papa, do you remember this day last year ?'
 said Johnnie, detaining his father after his Greek
 lesson.

' Yes, my boy !' It had been that on which he

had accepted Robert's offer, and released John from the impending drudgery of a lawyer's office. Oh, if he now had had even such a prospect before him, how light-hearted father and son would have been ! The hopes that Mr. Jones's opinion had given were fast passing away, and Mr. Reeves Willis, who being called to a patient near Worcester, had remembered the Arnolds came from that neighbourhood and had kindly found them out, had repeated his original opinion—nay, worse, owned to the father that less progress had been made than he had expected. And this opinion the Vicar, when asked for by John, had faithfully repeated—he kept nothing from him.

So all hope of entering the army flitted farther and farther away.

It was now a month since this opinion had been given. And even the father had learnt to bow before it, and so now answered ' Yes, my boy,' a little sadly, but with no shrinking.

' I felt sure you did, papa. Oh, it seems so clear. Do you remember how Frank and I walked to Massing that afternoon?—there and back in an hour and three-quarters ;' and he smiled with the thoughtful, patient expression becoming habitual to him. ' How strange, it seems so very long ago !'

' Very long ago, indeed,' said the Vicar, with a sigh.

' Papa, don't pity me ; it seems now so long ago, I do not care. I felt how sorry you were for me to-day, dear father : do you know, I can honestly say now, I am quite willing to lie here as long as

GOD pleases ; it has left off being hard : as He chooses it, it must be right. All I told you that day I so grieved you has been going away day after day, and now—dear, dear papa, all I want to do is something to help you ; but if that is not to be, I feel now so sure God will help me to bear it, even that is not a burden.'

And Johnnie put his thin, long fingers into his father's hand, with a quiet peaceful smile, that told his words were as truthful as ever, the expression of no passing feeling, but one it had now pleased the Healer of all sorrow to make an habitual source of patient cheerfulness.

No, Frank was again the trial, not John. Many and many a time did the Vicar, after the household was at rest, ponder over plan after plan for this son. Of one thing he had now made up his mind, cost what it would, Frank must be sent from home. John might now be able to bear to see his brother grow day by day more of a companion to the father to whom, not yet six months ago, he had been all in all in the house and out of doors alike ; but Frank could not yet bear to see, day by day, the effects of the fruit of his own temper. John's now settled cheerfulness was only a deeper reproach, one harder to bear than his depression or silence had ever been. This must not go on ; Frank's spirit was dark enough by nature, without this to sour and depress it. For the few months already passed, this having the consequences of his sin ever before him might have been a wholesome though heavy punishment ; but punishment should not go on for ever, and *this* the Vicar felt had already

endured too long. The Christmas holidays must end it.

But how?—oh, how? This served the Vicar for food for hour after hour of perplexity, when all were at rest, and quiet thinking was possible. Sometimes he thought of ‘Our Margaret;’ but humbled, as this last year had caused him to be, even still there was some bitterness in the smile with which he recalled the light heart with which a year ago he had sent his tale on her first journey. Oh, why could not Christ’s servant now, as Paul the tentmaker of old, labour with his own hands for his daily needs! No; the pen of an unknown man, with no friends to introduce him to editorial notice, no means to bring himself before the public, could not aid him. They must retrench; where? The Vicar smiled; but not bitterly, only sadly, as he thought of his beautiful wife’s shabby dresses, his children’s coarse clothing. Happily his was not a mind to be irritated by such tokens of poverty as might have been a daily cross to a more sensitive, fastidious man. No; there was but one extravagance of which they could be considered guilty,—a governess. Ah, it would be a hard blow to Miss Storey, to her pupils, to themselves; but she must go; though never should things in the school-room or out of it, return to the confusion into which they had fallen when she arrived fifteen months ago. Mary was now sixteen, and must fill Bridget’s place in the school-room to her younger sisters, whilst for herself, her father would do all he could. Happily, in mere accomplishments, she could be trusted to improve herself, as few girls could have had heart

to do, without help from masters or governess. It was a cruel determination, one to which it took Mr. Arnold a long time to arrive, but at last he satisfied himself that it was right, and then he tried to think no more about it till the time came for acting.

It was just at this time that Mr. William Arnold wrote to announce his daughter's wedding-day, which was fixed for the Wednesday week following, claiming his cousin's promise to marry the young couple. The very idea of change cheered the Vicar's heart, to see relations, however distant, London, a little fresh society, was a treat few could so enjoy, for few have so earned it. It may seem childish ; but to those who in all things, great and small, strive to follow the example their Saviour has left them, it is given to be as children to the end of the longest life. His step grew brisk again, he played with Robert and Mabel as of old ; and the cheerful, happy smile of former days took the place of the sad and patient one, which had become habitual to him.

He would be from home five whole days, and would leave the burden of life behind him.

'Well, Annie,' cried he, as the morning came, and he bade his wife farewell, 'I hope young Hopkins' fee will cover the expenses of my journey and new gloves, or I shall be, as Frank would say, rather 'sold.' And so, with a laugh, he was off. That week did, indeed, do him a world of good. The atmosphere of Arundel Villa was cheerful, kindly, and prosperous. His cousin was delighted to see him ; Mary Louisa herself very beaming and

happy ; the future bridegroom, not quite a gentleman—the Vicar would not have liked his own Mary to marry a Hopkins—but was a very honest, sensible young man, whose shrewdness and industry had already won for him a position in the commercial world which men, ten years older than himself, envied him. The wedding-day came ; the north-easterly wind was giving Clapham the benefit of London smoke, and the morning was dull and murky ; but the cheerful hilarity in-doors compensated at the breakfast for the lack of sunshine without, and marriage had so opened the careful merchant's heart that he deemed a twenty-pound note only a fitting acknowledgment of the service the country Vicar had done him, in making the young girl he had so long loved his for ever.

What was the Vicar's first thought ?—a mercenary one ? Did he think of the twenty golden sovereigns the flimsy sheet of paper represented ? Yes ; even when congratulating the bride's mother, he was thinking of her son-in-law's liberality. ' Ah ! ' was his first, last, and ever present thought throughout the day, from this time—' this will send Frank to Rayston for one half-year, and Mary and Anna *can* and shall have Miss Storey till Midsummer ; half a-year is such a gain at Mary's age. I wish I had a cousin's daughter to marry to as liberal a young fellow every half-year.' Henceforth he regarded the bridegroom's family with quite a different eye. Mr. Hopkins, senior, whom he had formerly looked upon as a pompous mass of good-looking humanity, had really a very benevolent forehead, and was rather a fine, venerable old man, after all.

His wife's tastes certainly lay in the direction of gay colours and fine clothes ; but if she liked the first, why should not she wear them ?—and if the mass of feathers, velvet, and lace was rather oppressive after Lady Duthoyte's quiet good taste—(he had dined at Carlton-terrace the evening before,) Mrs. Hopkins' liking to heap these costly materials together was at least good for trade ; rich people ought to spend their money one way or another, and this the Hopkins's certainly did, in their handsome 'Campbell House,' with its miniature pleasure-grounds, their servants, liveries, carriages, and horses ; their autumn tour, their daughter's education, their five sons' entrance into life. In the course of ten minutes' conversation with Mrs. Hopkins, Mr. Arnold had learnt that Acton was at the Cape with his regiment, Walter a curate at St. Veronica's, Albert at Christ-Church, Reginald at Eton ; whilst Charles the bridegroom's share in the business produced to him already a thousand a-year clear profit. Good old Mrs. Hopkins !—she told all with such genuine pride and pleasure, that no one could even smile at her, far less such a gentleman as the Vicar of Aggesden. He honoured and loved her for her pride, when she ended by whispering confidentially :—

‘ And Sam, you know, began life as a sweeper, in what is now his own counting-house !’

Yes ; those ring-begemmed hands had for two years handled a broom and dustpan. And what then ? All honour to them both in that state and this. Samuel Hopkins could look all men in the face as fearlessly now as when a sweeper, fifty years

ago ; for now, as then, he owed no man anything ; and, in these fifty years, no one step in the ladder of life had been otherwise than honestly and honourably gained.

The bride, a very pretty, elegant young woman, whose beauty stood to the Hopkins's in place of the dowry their son Charles might easily have obtained (if content with a plainer girl, in half-a-dozen Clapham homes, far more on a par with his own than Arundel Villa), left at four o'clock for Paris, and then the breakfast party broke up, to meet again at eight for a dance, in honour of the wedding. Mr. Arnold stood against the wall most of the evening, watching the gay scene, light steps, and merry music, with great interest, wishing his Mary had been there to enjoy it also, and make a pretty pair in good looks to Ellinor Arnold, by whose beauty Frank might well have been struck. Then, growing rather weary, he turned into the smaller drawing-room, where card-playing was going on amongst the elders.

Here was Mr. Hopkins, a mere looker-on ; he had never in his life played a game of chance, for love or money, and would not begin such a practice, when nearly three-score years old, even in honour of his son's wedding-day. Mr. Arnold made some remark on the time the young people would reach Paris, and this led the old gentleman to speak of his own recent tour.

‘ One of the pleasures of travelling is, that it introduces you to so many pleasant people,’ said the Vicar, as Mr. Hopkins paused.

‘ Yes ; very pleasant indeed. Now, at Ratis-

bon this year, we met with a remarkably interesting family—the father, a Worcestershire baronet, terribly cut up by his wife's death ; the daughter a particularly nice girl. My wife took quite a fancy to her ; indeed, she spent one or two evenings with us, in a quiet way.'

'What!—excuse me ; but was it poor Sophy Merivale?' asked Mr. Arnold, who had found the old man's previous long narrations of his travelling adventures rather wearisome, but was now fully roused to interest.

'Yes ; Merivale was the name. What, are you acquainted with the family, sir?' Mr. Hopkins asked, in his turn, regarding the country Vicar with less condescension and more respect, upon this naturally familiar mention of Sophy Merivale.

'Oh yes ! have been all my life—at least, the last five-and-twenty years of it. Sir Hector is lord of the manor of my parish, and patron of the living. So you saw them both—may I ask when ?'

'In November, sir. Yes, the third of November we first had the pleasure of making their acquaintance. We had been in the same hotel for some days ; but we English abroad are so formal, you know, that, though we had met the young lady twenty times on the stairs, neither had spoken to the other. But on that day—yes, it was the third, or was it the fourth ? Excuse me, I will just ask Florence, she was with us. Florence, my dear, was it on November the third or fourth we first met that very pleasant family, the Merivales ?'

Florence, a plain, under-sized, but pleasant-looking

young lady, no longer 'quite young,' settled that it was on October the twenty-sixth they had reached Ratisbon, and on the third of November they had first spoken to Miss Merivale.

'Ah, yes, I thought it was the third. Well, then, on the third, Mrs. Hopkins and myself had been out exploring the beauties of the city, and coming home were caught in a heavy shower of rain, and were standing under a shop-awning, when a young lady in deep mourning drove up in a carriage and went into the next shop, followed by her courier. In a minute or two, the man came out again, and approaching Mrs. Hopkins and myself, touched his hat and said, 'Miss Merivale's compliments to us, and if the carriage could convey us to the hotel, it was quite at our service; she should not be making use of it for the next quarter of an hour.' Very polite of the young lady, indeed.'

'Very like her! So you accepted the offer?'

'Certainly; for we particularly wished to be home by two—always dine early, sir—far healthier than these fashionable late hours; in town, Sarah says, one must follow the fashion; but abroad I do as I like. Well, so the next time we met the young lady, we took the opportunity of thanking her, and my wife was so pleased by her—none of your aristocrat's absurd airs, as if earth was not good enough to hold her,—and her deep mourning looked so sad, we asked about them, and then I called on Sir Hector and my wife on her daughter.'

Mr. Arnold thought, what would have been poor Lady Agnes's feelings on such acquaintances thrusting themselves upon her, and smiled; then sighed

as he remembered the mouldering dust which would soon be all of Lady Agnes left on earth.

‘And did you see Sir Hector?’ he asked, eagerly.

‘Why, yes—quite the gentleman, quite the gentleman; but we thought afterwards the man had mistaken his orders, for he seemed a little surprised to see us come in; and, indeed, was in no state to receive visitors. I fear we were intrusive; but Sarah felt so sorry for his young daughter.’

‘He was very much cast down still, poor fellow.’

If a Vicar of a little country parish called a live baronet of six feet two and 8,000*l.* a-year, a ‘poor fellow,’ why should not Samuel Hopkins do the same?

‘Yes, indeed, poor fellow:—and a very fine man he is. He roused himself to speak once or twice to my wife, but his daughter did most of the talking, and very pleasant she made herself; and Florence, who was with us, soon made friends with her, over a sketch she had been finishing as we entered. So, seeing she was fond of drawing, my wife asked her to come up and spend an hour in the evening, and see Florence’s own sketches in Belgium,—which, by-the-bye, her old master, Copley Fielding, thinks very remarkably clever—you would like to see one,’ looking round the walls.

‘Very much, indeed. I will call to-morrow to do so, if I may; but poor Sophy, she was in pretty good spirits, then, herself?’

‘Yes; very fair. She was very sociable and

pleasant. Unfortunately, we went away four days afterwards, but the last night we had her up to tea ; and then whilst I was busy with my newspaper and Sarah asleep over her knitting, she told Florence something of her late loss, and how she longed to be in England amongst her friends again, but that Sir Hector could not bear the thought of returning.'

'Poor Sophy !'

'There is a large family, I believe ? She had with her an invalid brother, on whose account, indeed, she was particularly anxious to return—he was growing so weary of foreign life.'

'Ah, yes ! The eldest son ; a cripple from a year old. A large family, indeed ! five or six sons and five or six daughters.'

'One married sister had been, I know, to see her—the Countess of Duthoyte—often meet her husband at the Clergy Orphan Committee,—nice, sensible fellow, very.'

'Very. I was dining with him only yesterday, and I fear from what Lady Duthoyte told me that her father is as far now as ever from being able to make up his mind to meet old scenes and old faces.'

'I must tell my wife you know them ;' but Sarah was deep in her rubber ; 'Florence, then ;' but Florence, who had been called away to dance, directly after her father had asked her to decide between the 3rd and 4th of November, was now at liberty again, and a very pleasant half-hour Mr. Arnold spent with her, hearing much of what he and Lady Duthoyte alike longed to know, but could only learn from an eye-witness ; and when he lost

Miss Hopkins' companionship, by some Clapham friend offering her his arm to lead to the supper-room, he felt quite glad that Sophy had had the comfort of one so unobtrusively kind-hearted and sensible, to whom to open a little her heavily-laden heart.



CHAPTER VII.

OLD FRIENDS.

Our friendship's not a stream to dry,
 Or stop with angry jar ;
 A life-long planet in our sky—
 No meteor-shooting star.

* * * * *

Meanwhile thine intellects presage
 A life-time rich in truth,
 And make me feel th' advance of age
 Retarded by thy youth !

CAMPBELL.

LIKING Miss Hopkins so much, the Vicar did call the next day to see her drawings, and left Campbell House more pleased with its quiet, sensible, and lady-like elder daughter than he had been with any one he had seen since he left Aggesden. The good impression was reciprocal. Florence Hopkins was quite capable of appreciating good taste, sense, and gentlemanliness ; Mrs. Hopkins had been quite charmed by his courtesy to herself, and quiet admiration of her daughter's performances ; the kindness with which he had patted Sancho and prescribed for Blanche, two petted Skyes. So when, after dinner, the family at Campbell House were seated comfortably round the dining-table, reflecting, mirror-like, the plate and glass upon it, the rich crimson curtains drawn, and the fire blazing gloriously, the wife said,

‘Don’t you think, Sam, it would be only a proper compliment to ask Mr. Frank Arnold to dinner some day?’

‘Well, Sarah, I was just thinking the very same thing. Quite a proper compliment, seeing he married Charles, and knows the Merivales too, and a very pleasant gentlemanly fellow he is.’

‘More, papa; he is connected with them,’ said Florence, to whom the Vicar had been more communicative than to her father; ‘his own wife was a Miss Merivale, cousin—*second* cousin, he took care to say—to the Sir Hector we met.’

‘Indeed!’ said Mr. Hopkins, wishing he had known this when speaking of their own intimacy with the Worcestershire Baronet.

‘The worst is, Sam, he leaves the day after to-morrow.’

‘Well, then, ask him to-morrow, and get a few fit people to meet him. I’ll tell Walter to come, and bring down young Herbert with him. Write the note this evening—sorry it never struck me before.’

And so that evening, in the midst of a game at blind-man’s-buff with his little cousins, Mrs. Hopkins’ polite invitation was handed to Mr. Arnold. The invitation was evidently considered a very flattering attention by Mr. and Mrs. William Arnold, who had before this confided to their country cousin, that Mary Louisa had made a wonderfully good match; that at first Mr. Hopkins had not liked his son’s marrying out of their own set, and style of living; but that the comparatively gentle blood of the Arnolds, Mary Louisa’s beauty, and

Charles' quiet determination to marry no bride that was not of his own choosing, had eventually carried the day.

No one made a doubt of such an attention being gratefully accepted, and so Mr. Arnold wrote and accepted it, though he had half promised Netta to spend an hour or two in Carlton Terrace this last afternoon. He was soon, however, reconciled to the change ; he liked seeing life, and life amongst wealthy parvenus was quite new to him. He liked Florence Hopkins, and he liked a hearty welcome, and even this last did not fail him.

'So delighted,' said Mrs. Hopkins, as he stood talking to his hostess ; on the velvety drawing-room carpet, no other guest having yet arrived ; 'quite a catch ; Walter writes us word he finds George Hatherton is in town, and he has caught him for to-night. Oh, you must know Mr. Hatherton,' seeing the Vicar looked puzzled, 'a celebrated author who has written so many—— Florence, my dear, what is it Mr. Hatherton writes?'

'Novels, mamma ; and now they say he is bringing out a new periodical, *The Common-sense Magazine*. Walter is nearly sure Mr. Hatherton is the editor, but he will not own it, if he is.'

'George Hatherton,' repeated Mr. Arnold, thoughtfully.

'Oh, surely you have heard of him,' said poor Mrs. Hopkins, entreatingly, afraid otherwise he would not appreciate the honour of dining in Mr. Hatherton's company.

'George Hatherton. Ah, novels are so little in my way. But I shall be none the less proud to

dine at the same table as a successful author. The name seems very familiar ; I think I must at least have heard his works discussed, though I'm so stupid as not to remember the name of one of them.'

'Florence, my dear Florence, what are Mr. Hatherton's works ? We ought to have them on the table, and you must talk to him about them ; I never can remember names.'

'He must have heard of them so often, he will be quite glad to find them forgotten for once, mamma. *Lionel Grey* is one, Mr. Arnold ; *Hope On* another. We like them very much ; there is something so—so downright and exciting about them. But others think they want plot. The *Times* cut up the first terribly ; however, it has reached a fourth edition notwithstanding.'

'He is such a funny man,' pursued Mrs. Hopkins, who never liked the conversation to be long taken out of her own hands : 'so tall, such thick bushy hair, wrings one's hand so ; really he quite cut my little finger with this ring the last time he came, and——'

'Mamma, he is just coming in,' interrupted Florence, warningly.

Yes ; the great man, the gun of the evening, was already in the room, and taking the place Mr. Arnold quietly vacated for him, was wringing Mrs. Hopkins' hand before the old lady knew what either he or she was about.

'Oh, Mr. Hatherton ! so very glad to see you—must introduce—excuse me—Mr. Arnold, where are you ?'

‘Arnold!’ shouted the great George Hatherton.
‘Why, Frank!’

‘What! Hatherton of Baliol!’ returned the Vicar, still doubting his senses and memory.

‘To be sure;’ and the successful author nearly wrung the fingers of his unsuccessful brother off. ‘Why, who would have thought of our ever meeting again! Where have you been all these years? The last I heard of you was taking that unlicked cub, young Merivale, in hand: brought him to my chambers once, I remember.’

‘Where have I been?—why at home, Aggesden Vicarage, Worcestershire.’

‘And never let me know!’

‘You knew I was ordained? Any Clergy List——’

‘Oh, yes; but life is so busy. So you’ve been in Worcestershire all your life! Well, I’ve been everywhere. North Pole — Timbuctoo — Ceylon. Would be off to any one of them again to-morrow if I had the chance. Come, Arnold, I engage you for a walking tour across Australia next summer.’

‘Declined, with thanks. But, Hatherton, where are *you*?’

‘In Mrs. Hopkins’ drawing-room,’ said Mr. Hatherton, bowing to that lady; ‘a fact, I am afraid, ma’am, I had for the moment forgotten; but when an old college friend turns up in this way, three minutes’ oblivion of manners will be excused in your hospitable house, I am sure. Ah, and Miss Hopkins! I believe you two ladies knew all the time what a treat you had in store for me, and this made my young friend Walter, there, so determined to bring me down to-night.’

‘No, indeed we did not know. I was just mentioning your name and works, and he could not remember either,’ answered Mrs. Hopkins, eagerly, anxious to defend herself.

‘What? well, I forgive your saying you never heard of my works,—but not remember George Hatherton!’

‘It was no more than George Hatherton did by myself,’ retorted Mr. Arnold; ‘or why has not he found me out, and come to see me before this?’

‘Because college friends are very pleasant things, but drop terribly out of sight. Why, only to-day, I saw the death of Tom Inglis, at Calcutta, and never heard he had gone. Where are Fisher, Moore, and all our old set, who knows?’

‘Who, indeed? but it does one good to see an old face turn up, Hatherton.’

‘Doesn’t it?’ heartily. ‘Ah, Mrs. Hopkins, I never will believe but that you knew what a treat you had in store for me, and that demure rogue Walter too!’

Mrs. Hopkins again protested her innocence, though in terms not quite so innocently severe as before. Mr. Hopkins was delighted that such a happy chance had occurred under his roof; other guests arrived, and the company were speedily marshalled to the dining-room, where every delicacy, in and out of season, awaited them. Mr. Arnold had a Mrs. Brown, a very supercilious, over-dressed, great grocer’s wife, on one side of him, but Florence Hopkins on the other, so made himself very happy with her whenever Mr. Hatherton was not amusing the

whole table, which, however, was very generally the case.

‘Is he much altered?’ Florence asked, when the peals of laughter one of the author’s tales had elicited were over.

‘No, very little ; not in manner at all. He never had one particle of false shame or vanity in his nature. Ah, that’s the kind of man that gets on in the world!’ And Mr. Arnold thought of ‘Our Margaret’ lying unknown in his corner cupboard. And yet, how this very man had commended it, when contributed to a manuscript magazine, which the now popular author had started just six months before they both left Oxford, to meet only twice again till now.

‘Was he a literary man at college?’ pursued Florence, sharing all a young lady’s curiosity to know something of the private life of those whose works they admire.

‘Very. Not a reading man ; with any pains, he might have taken much higher honours than he did ; but a most clever, amusing companion, and most kind-hearted friend. Oh, the many evenings we, and the Inglis and Fisher he mentioned, have spent together.’

‘Did he write then?’

‘Oh, yes! he was the heart and soul of a college magazine. Clever his tales and essays always were ; but rather startling and paradoxical. He loved nothing better than to take his audience completely in, making them believe he admired his heroine, till in the last chapter you discovered the faultless, complacent, perpetually-hurt Agnes Murray, the

poor cousin, had never been *his* heroine at all ; but the little Mary Smith, the city heiress, whom (though never bold enough to venture the opinion) you had always thought, in spite of her red hands and supposed unkindness to the lovely, penniless Agnes, by far the more interesting and pleasing character of the two. Ah, I dare say some of these old tales will be coming out in this new periodical of his. What is it?—*The Common Sense Magazine*? I shall make Hatherton supply me with a monthly copy half-price, in consideration of ‘Auld Lang Syne.’”

Here, Mr. Arnold was called upon to say grace, and, not very long after, the ladies rose, leaving Mr. Hopkins, Mr. Brown, Frank Arnold, George Hatherton, the young curate, Walter, and *his* college friend, Frederick Herbert, the son of an Honourable, to enjoy themselves apart or together as they chose—and enjoy themselves they certainly did ; the two citizens talked over wines of this and that vintage, Mr. Arnold and George Hatherton of Fisher, Inglis, and Moore—of the happy old days at Baliol,—the two young curates of the impending dispute between the Bishop of their diocese and Mr. ———.

Returning to the drawing-room, talk, music, and engravings passed the next half-hour very pleasantly. The younger Miss Hopkins played as well as Florence drew. Miss Brown, a plump, good-humoured little body (heiress, as only child, to a very large fortune, and whom Mr. Hopkins had still good hope of seeing his daughter-in-law, though by Charles he had here been sadly disappointed), sang pathetic songs

in the fullest, happiest voice imaginable, whilst Walter Hopkins turned over the leaves and admired the songs and the singer *sotto voce*. At ten Mr. Arnold was countryfied enough to wish to take his leave, but Mrs. Hopkins started up in consternation. Mr. Hatherton laid his hands on him and said 'Sit down, man ;' and when Mrs. Hopkins began, 'Oh, Mr. Arnold, we do so want to know how that dear little fellow, your son, is,' having drawn the kind-hearted old lady a little apart, he found so much to say in answer to her sympathizing questions and brimming eyes, that the clock was striking eleven when he really left the house. Even then he had promised Mr. Hatherton to walk to the cab-stand with him.

'So you have children, Arnold ? You did tell me you were married, I remember ; but you said nothing about the other hostages to fortune.'

'Did I not ? Only, then, because I feared to make a bachelor envious. Yes, I have eight, great and small, from sixteen to six. Come and see them, Hatherton.'

'I will. So your wife is the lovely Miss Merivale I once met at old Sir John's, in Berkeley-square ? What a sweet-looking woman she was ; well, I thought—'

'What ?'

'Your pupil meant her for himself.'

'Oh, no ; never !'

'I wish I'd known that twenty years ago ! Charming woman—very ! So now she has eight little plagues to wear her to death.'

'To try her a good deal, certainly. But we

cannot look for the blessing of children without some cares.'

'Four sons, did you say? What do you mean to do for them?'

'The best I can,' answered the Vicar, quietly. 'One is, as perhaps you heard me telling Mrs. Hopkins, for the present, quite laid by.'

'No! how? in what manner?'

'An accident. He has injured his spine. Oh, Hatherton! if you had seen him this time last year, Annie Merivale's own son, such a straight, active little fellow, with the handsomest face and best disposition in the world! He was to have gone into the army. Now—'

'Oh, surely, he's not injured for life?' asked his friend, anxiously.

'Oh, no! we hope three years will do something; set him on his legs again, if not see him as strong as ever. And my little Mabel! ah, Hatherton! author as you are, you would admire her sweetness and beauty!'

'Oh, Arnold! how funny it is to hear you turned into pater-familias, whilst I have as few ties as ever. Ah, but I have a nephew—a rather distinguished nephew, overrun with his wife's relations—somewhere in your parts—young Hughes, of Trinity.'

'What, Hughes, rector of Marshland, your nephew? Ah, now I know what made me from the first take such a liking to him!'

'Well, I don't think we are alike in anything save height; we match there to an inch. He loves music, I don't care for it. I love my heroines, he laughs at them. And now he has a little

daughter, four weeks old, to which he wants me to stand godfather, promising to give her the name of my last heroine 'Susan,' as some reparation for the many aspersions he cast on that much-injured lady's character, when we last met.'

'And do you mean to take the office?'

'Well—I don't know: I hate babies; but twenty years hence it may be very convenient to have a niece, bound to read me the paper before I go out, and warm my slippers before I come in. So I don't know but that three weeks hence I may come and take you by storm at—what's the name of the place?'

'Aggesden. But the Hughes' know us well, and will direct you when you're at Marshland.'

'Ah! but even if I don't go there, I mean to come down and see you. Quite the country Vicar, eh? with eight children, a lovely wife, and 'passing rich on forty pounds a-year.''

'Just able to get along on ten times that sum. Come, by all means, and you'll find a hearty welcome whenever it is;' and so the two parted.



CHAPTER VIII.

FRANK'S STRUGGLES.

How bright soe'er the prospect seems,
 All thoughts of friendship are but dreams,
 If envy chance to creep in.

COWPER.

MR. HUGHES had engaged to look after the parish generally, during Mr. Arnold's absence; also, to take the nine o'clock service at Aggesden, before the later one at Marshlands, on St. Thomas's Day. So on the latter morning, when the Arnolds went into their pew, they were not much surprised to find a girl of thirteen already within it; at once guessing she was one of the two Miss Lees who had been expected at Marshlands the previous week. When the service was over, Anna begged her mother to ask Miss Lee to stay and spend the day with them; but Miss Lee was found to be the bearer of a note from Mrs. Hughes, asking Mary and Anna to return in the pony-carriage with her husband and sister, and spend the day and sleep at Marshlands.

Both the girls were eager to go. Anna had been very dull all this autumn and winter, without cousins, and Mary was inclined to like any connexion of the Hughes'. They had half an hour in which to prepare, for Mr. Hughes had

promised to visit a sick parishioner in the Vicar's absence.

So Lucy Lee was left in the dining-room with Mrs. Arnold and Mabel to entertain her, whilst the two girls went to get ready for their visit. Mary's preparations were soon completed : if she had not known she could lay immediate hands on clean collar, sleeves, &c., &c., she would not have been so willing to pay such a visit. So her best gown, bonnet, and cloak were on and her share of the carpet-bag packed, whilst Anna was still hunting desperately in her drawer for a clean collar.

'Come, Anna, make haste !' cried Mary.

'I am making all the haste.—Oh, here it is ! no, it has been worn, I declare. Oh, Mary, do lend me a collar !'

'Well, I suppose you must have one. But how am I ever to keep neat myself, if you are always borrowing first one thing, then another ?' and Mary had suffered enough inconvenience from Anna's many loans to excuse her reluctance to oblige her.

'There, now, I'm just ready. Thank you ;' and Anna began hastily tying on her bonnet, hoping as she did so that Mary would not notice, what now first struck herself, that she had again forgotten to put in the clean cap Mary had been so vexed at her omitting the last time she had worn the bonnet. Mary's eyes were, however, too sharp for any such untidiness to escape her.

'What, have not you put in your cap even yet ?' she asked, as if utterly despairing of her little sister.

‘Here, give it me. I’ll put it in whilst you finish your side of the bag.’

At last bonnet and bag were complete, and the two girls ran into the dining-room, just as Mr. Hughes drove up to the door.

Mary sat by his side, Anna and Lucy behind. These two were soon talking so freely and happily that Mary was quite distressed at the loudness of Anna’s voice and laugh, and did not at all (as Mr. Hughes was fearing) wish she herself were in the back seat also. She and her companion kept up a more languid, but far more decorous discourse, till they reached Marshlands, where Mrs. Hughes could do little more than shake hands and introduce them to her other sister Charlotte, before it was time for these two to set off for their own service.

Lucy soon ran up to fetch the baby, and then Anna burst out, ‘Isn’t she a nice girl? do you know she is just my age: my birthday’s the 8th, and hers the 27th, and Charlotte is only three years older; but doesn’t she look quite a young lady? Lucy says she is so glad they are going to live with Mrs. Hughes; but that Charlotte doesn’t like leaving school and London, she was such a favourite with the mistress. Oh, and do you know, every other day they had to speak German? I am so glad Miss Storey never thought of that.’

‘We could not have done it, if she had; and never shall be able now.’

Here Lucy Lee returned. She was a rather pretty girl of not quite thirteen. Her hair yellow, and eyes blue; a soft, gentle, sleepy expression pervading features and figure. Nevertheless this

young lady and bluff, brisk Anna so quickly became friends that Mary was already beginning to feel *de trop* and far too old for her companions before the elder party returned from Church. By this time it was twelve, and Mrs. Hughes proposed the four girls should walk in the garden till the one o'clock dinner, and drive with her to Worcester, if they liked it, in the afternoon.

It was a soft, still day, very unlike winter ; the sun bright, chrysanthemums glistening in the genial glare : a day when the most suffering or heavy-hearted amongst us feels a joyful throb within that makes him thank God for his existence : a thanksgiving at other times often hard to offer. Lucy and Anna hurried out together, and Charlotte and Mary soon followed in a more sedate manner. Charlotte, however, was from the first talkative and gay enough. She chatted and laughed in a friendly easy manner, first on one subject, then on another, and had all the animation that Lucy lacked ; otherwise she resembled her sister in complexion and figure ; only was prettier and more developed : ' quite a young lady,' as Anna had said, in the easy assurance with which she treated not only her guests but her host, whom all the Arnolds had always held in such respect that they did not quite like seeing him so treated,—in truth Mr. Hughes did not approve of it himself. Nor did he mean to submit to it much longer ; only he had made himself obnoxious enough for the present to the young lady by taking her away from a fashionable school, where she had been the pet of mistress and masters.

To Worcester the ladies of the party drove in the

carriage and pair, after dinner. Mrs. Hughes took her guests to the China Manufactory, a new and most interesting sight to all. Peter and James Lee joined them at tea, and afterwards, when they adjourned to the drawing-room, the evening began rather formally by Mrs. Hughes requesting her sister to play, which request she immediately acceded to by performing Oösten's graceful *Wenn die Schwalben*, with as much self-possession and facility as if it had been the simplest piece in the world.

Mary listened, or rather looked on, in astonishment; she had thought that in *music* she should surpass even this London-educated young lady; but there was no rivalling her manual dexterity, so when asked in her turn to play, she chose an Andante of Beethoven's, where feeling and expression would tell; knowing her own most effective shakes and runs would seem but clumsy performances, after Miss Lee's light and brilliant touch.

But the pianoforte was a new one, and stiff, her seat lower than that to which she was accustomed, the pedals in other places, and Mary soon felt that she had never played to so little advantage as now, when she was especially longing to do her best. This consciousness made her nervous, and play first hesitatingly, then hurriedly, and when the poor girl rose from the piano, she could have cried with vexation, to think how she had failed, where she had intended to shine. Mr. and Mrs. Hughes' and Charlotte's polite admiration of the piece itself only vexed her more. She wished she had refused to play at all as Anna did five minutes afterwards.

She almost wished she had never come to Marshlands ; and, whereas hitherto Charlotte Lee's friendly advances had rather flattered one little used to be made much of out of her own home, they now only irritated her, and seemed more incessant, which was really the case, for Charlotte liked Mary all the better for finding the playing that her brother-in-law had admired so much to her, was not to be compared to her own ; whilst Mary could not yet forgive Charlotte for surpassing her in the one accomplishment in which she had hoped to excel.

Poor Mary ! This was her first taste of a cup of bitterness, envy, and vexation, that the world is ever lifting to the lips of those who as yet think 'of themselves more highly than they ought to think ;' or are too eager for the breath of human praise. And who is not ?

Bagatelle followed, and here Mary's steady hand and eye stood her in good service, although her partner's reckless, dashing play, alternating as its success was always doing, from forty to nothing, gained their side on an average as much as Mary's own. Here, however the two elder girls won together, and were soon fast friends again.

When the boys joined them, Charlotte proposed dancing, which proposition James immediately seconded ; and, as Peter was not wanted, his dissentient voice was no obstacle. So the evening passed merrily till half-past nine, when the two Arnolds found a bright, blazing fire in their bedroom, over which they and their two new friends sat talking—I am ashamed to say how late ; finally plotting a dance on Lucy's birthday.

‘Oh, we must persuade Emily to let us have one! Who is there in the neighbourhood they could ask to it?’

‘Oh,’ cried Anna, ‘how I wish the Merivales would be at the Hall!’—a wish Mary secretly echoed, but was too proud to bring her rich connexions needlessly forward. ‘Hector and Aggy would so enjoy it!’

‘Who are they?’ Charlotte asked.

‘The Merivales—distant cousins—’ began Mary, quietly.

‘Oh, not so very distant,’ interrupted her sister, quite distressed. ‘He—Sir Hector—is mamma’s second cousin; but they always seem like brother and sister, and we call him uncle. But it was Hector and Harry I was thinking of.’

‘Well; but who could come? Why, the Dicksons, and—’

‘The Dicksons! What, has that queer little old woman any children?’ cried Charlotte. ‘Don’t you remember, Lucy, she was at the station on Thursday, and I laughed at her so, John got quite angry?’ and Miss Lee tossed her head, as much as to say, ‘Don’t think I mean to stand any lectures, John Hughes.’

‘Oh yes!’ answered Lucy, rather sleepily; ‘but surely she is not a lady?’

‘Isn’t she, Mary?’ asked Anna, much surprised. ‘Her husband is a clergyman.’

‘Oh, but all clergymen are not gentlemen,’ said Charlotte. ‘Indeed, sometimes they are very queer people indeed, I think. Don’t you remember that curate at Fishbay, Lucy, with the six children, and

only his curacy to live on? What funny, washed-out, old-fashioned things the children used to wear !'

Mary had reddened at Anna's introducing the Dicksons ; but her colour deepened at this remark, and still more at its tone.

'Being poor does not make any one cease to be a gentleman,' she said, rather shortly.

'Oh dear no ! Did I say so ? Only it makes them wear such queer clothes, and do such funny things. Do you know, we knew that when Mr. Smiley went up to London, to see his mother, who was ill, he went third class—just fancy !'

Mary remembered that Frank had so travelled to town this very year ; but was not quite bold enough to say so.

'Well, but this party. Yourself, and surely there *are* other people besides the Dicksons ?'

'Oh yes ; the Wills, and Lindsays, and Johnstones. They live in that new pretty house we passed half-way to Worcester,' answered Mary.

'Oh, that's right ! Well, I am so glad there are some neighbours. We should be dull enough here though, still, I am sure, if you were not happily so near us,' cried Charlotte. But here Mrs. Hughes, at her husband's instigation, crossed the passage, knocked at the Miss Arnolds' door, and sent her own sisters off to bed.

It was quite a pleasure to Bridget, on Saturday, to hear the briskness of the Vicar's step, the blitheness of his voice, as he once more stood within his little hall. And then, at tea, to hear him rally-

ing Mary, and talking to Mabel with his old, fond playfulness, admiring John's knitting with his old bright interest.

'Well, Frank,' said his wife, at last, when the description of the wedding, and the meeting with Mr. Hatherton, whom Mrs. Arnold could not remember at the party in Berkeley-square, was concluded; 'and has the bridegroom properly remunerated your trouble and expenses?'

'Oh, yes! far more than reimbursed—a twenty-pound note. Clapham merchants not only know how to gain money, but also how to spend it, I must confess.'

'Twenty pounds! Why, papa, you are come home quite a rich man,' said his wife.

'Quite.'

'What will oo do with it, papa?'

'Something useful, I hope, my darling.'

'A drawing-room carpet,' suggested Mary, half aloud—half in a whisper.

'A new horse, papa!' cried Harry.

'Take us to the sea, papa,' said Carry.

'Treat yourself to London again, your wife says, Frank,' said Mrs. Arnold, fondly; 'this little change has done you all the good in the world; you look quite a different creature.'

'And feel so. No; one such visit is enough for any man. Now, my Mabel, come up with papa, and help me to bring down the treasures which Aunt Ann has sent you all.'

He took the little girl in his arms, who immediately clasped her own fast round his neck, saying, 'Zoo never go away again so long, will oo?'

‘ Did my little one want me back ?’

‘ Oh, so much ! Zoo must take me with oo next time.’

‘ Well, we will see. There ; look at the heap,’ as he turned a pile of neatly papered parcels out of his portmanteau ; ‘ you carry the small ones, I the big ; and so, both well laden, they went down into the drawing-room.

‘ There ! I really think Ann, or William, or the children, have provided something for all.’

‘ Ah !’ as John’s eyes brightened at the sight of a beautiful box of water-colours, ‘ I said you had books enough, and were hoping to learn to draw this winter ;’ then, turning to Frank, ‘ Your uncle sent you half a sovereign, as he said money never came amiss to boys ; and I had better give it you at once, before the new carpet, pony, and trip to the sea-side have run away with every penny I possess.’

Frank’s face flushed ; he took the money eagerly ; it was a sum that only Sir Hector’s munificence had as yet put within *his* grasp, and that but once.

‘ How very kind of them all,’ said Mrs. Arnold, with a mother’s pleasure in kindness done to her children ; ‘ we must have one of the girls here in the summer, if they can spare her ; fortunately, we have a neighbourhood worth seeing, if no other inducement.

Altogether, the evening was a very happy one, and so much laughing and talking ensued (though for the next two hours Mary and Anna had not a thought but for their new books), that when the

elder children went off to bed at nine, Bridget following to write in her own room, the silence seemed quite marked.

The husband and wife sat over the fire for a few minutes without breaking it ; then Mrs. Arnold said, putting her hand in her husband's—

‘It is such a comfort, my love, to see you looking so well again.’

‘I? Oh, yes, as well as possible. And you—how have you got on? Frank has not troubled you, I trust?’

‘No ; once he and Harry got to high words ; but Harry was in the wrong, I think, and Frank desisted as soon as I interposed, which I was almost sorry to do ; it was a real comfort to see some of the poor boy’s old vehemence.’

‘Yes, it would be. Anna, I tell you what I mean to do with the twenty pounds ; send Frank at once to school ; or, rather, it will enable us to keep Miss Storey at least till Midsummer, instead of now giving her only three months’ notice.’

‘Oh, that is really quite a comfort to me ; she is such a nice person, and, I really think, so fond of us all. I was quite dreading your being obliged to tell her as soon as you came back. Nothing is further from her wishes or thoughts than leaving us, I do believe.’

‘I wish nothing need be further from ours ; however, losing her is a trouble which must be borne some day. I think I shall prepare her now ; knowing as we do Midsummer must be our limit, it is but fair she should be aware of this at once, that she may have time to find a situation to her mind.’

‘It will spoil her Christmas, I am afraid.’

‘And the children’s, too. Yes, we will wait till Wednesday. There is no such great hurry ; but I don’t like to let her continue to think she is fixed here till Mabel is grown up, as we have quite made up our minds we must no longer indulge in the luxury of a governess.’

‘Frank certainly ought to be away from home ; but it seems hard Mary and Anna should be sacrificed for one boy.’

‘It is hard ; but the fate of women through life is to be sacrificed to their male relations. They begin the lesson in the nursery. Besides, here we have thoroughly decided the evil must be, and so we’ll not count over its hardships again ; and really Mary, at sixteen, will be as well informed and useful as many girls of twenty. I am only afraid she will make rather too strict a governess in Miss Storey’s place, if such a thing be possible. What a comfort she is the daughter she is !’

‘Yes, indeed. I often wonder, if Anna had been the elder, how we should have got on.’

‘Ah ! but I don’t like Mary’s being praised at Anna’s expense ; both have their faults, but their good qualities also. And Anna by and by, if she take pains with herself, will make, it may be, the more sterling woman of the two.’

‘No, no, Frank !’

‘Well, we wont dispute that either. It’s too pleasant to be sitting by one’s own hearth again, one’s wife by one’s side, to think of disagreeing, however amicably. So you have had a prosperous week without me ?’

‘Yes, as well as—no, a great deal better than, any one could expect. Frank has really been very useful, walking to Massing once for me, and to the Hughes’s with a note. Ah, I do not think you have heard of the birth of a little daughter there?’

‘Oh yes; Hatherton told me he had been asked to stand godfather. He will come on and see us if he accept the office—even if he does not, he said he would come into Worcestershire on purpose to see us. Annie, you wont make me so welcome, now I confess to having asked a friend to come in any day that he likes.’

‘No, Frank; that would have been only in the old days of confusion, before Miss Storey came; now the children are orderly and tidy, and keep the rooms so, I don’t care.’

‘Which days of confusion shall never return,’ said the Vicar; ‘I will become a tyer of pinafores and looker after clean hands and faces sooner. But you are tired, and can suppress yawns no longer, so go up to bed. I must just look through to-morrow’s sermon.’

Perhaps to no one was it a greater comfort to see the Vicar so cheerful and happy again than to Johnnie. Certainly to no one was it a greater comfort to have him back at all, cheerful or grave. Nevertheless, all had been as kind and thoughtful to the invalid as possible during his absence. Frank had almost oppressed him by his eagerness to anticipate every wish, and his determination never to enjoy himself if he could be of the slightest use to his brother. Mr. Arnold had left his eldest son work to do in his absence, enough to occupy him for a couple

of hours every morning, and this he found on his return had been well and thoroughly done.

‘One thing, sir,’ said Frank, reddening as his father commended him ; ‘you meant me, I think, to do an exercise every day. I forgot once, on Friday ; those two were both done on Saturday.’

‘Oh, well, never mind, they are all very *well* done,’ said the Vicar, sorry it was still such an effort to the boy to speak an unnecessary word to him, but appreciating fully the feeling which prompted the effort. Harry was rather fidgetty and pre-occupied after his week’s holiday, but Mr. Arnold had spirits to cope good-humouredly with this distracted mood, and nothing marred the peace of the morning’s lessons.

‘Frank,’ said his father, when they were over, ‘can you walk over to Marshlands with me this afternoon?’

The boy’s face fell, but he answered at once,

‘Oh, yes.’

‘No, never mind,’ said his father, good-naturedly ; ‘I dare say you have some other plan for your spare time, and I can say what I have to say just as well now,—which is nothing very alarming, Frank,’ he added, seeing the boy look as if he feared some reproof ; ‘only this, that after Christmas we are thinking of sending you to school.’

Frank did not answer, only gazed steadily out of the window.

‘I thought you would like it, my boy,’ said the Vicar, a little disappointed.

How different was this from John’s ecstasy this time last year.

‘Oh, yes—thank you,’ turning away his face.

‘Frank, what is it?’ asked the father, laying his hand on his son’s shoulder.

‘It—it seems taking *his* place more than ever,’ his mouth quivering.

‘Oh, my boy, don’t take it in that light; don’t ever think of it so. I am sure John himself will not, and you are *not* taking his place; a friend paid for him—I shall have the happiness of paying for you.’

‘Happiness! Oh, father, when I have nearly broken——’

‘My heart?’ asked the Vicar, smiling kindly. ‘No, no, Frank; you may have taught me how hard it was to practise the forgiveness and resignation which I have all my life been preaching, but you have not broken my heart. I wanted change and have had it; now you want it and must have it too.’

‘If it could only be Johnnie.’

‘Why should it not be Frank instead? I always felt it a little hard that the younger brother should have such an advantage over the elder; if ever things were unfair it was last year; now they will be straight again.’

Frank stood with his lips firmly pressed together, his eyes swimming, but determined not to give way. It was cowardly to move his father by tears, and he would swallow them if they choked him.

‘Frank, I mean to be open to you, and so will not conceal that what I truly called the ‘happiness’ of sending you to school, is one which (like every other worth having) it is a matter of some

difficulty to accomplish. This unexpected twenty pounds makes it easy the first half-year, but after that we must retrench in order to continue it.'

'Oh, then, don't do it,' cried Frank.

'But when it is the right thing to do, who cares for the cost? We must part with Miss Storey at Midsummer—don't interrupt me again, Frank, just yet,—but Mary is clever and steady enough to do a great deal for Anna and Carry for some time to come. And who knows but that if you have a fair start in life yourself, you may be repaying Mary for her own loss, ten years hence, by giving her pet, Mabel, advantages she may never have had herself, but which she would ten times rather her little sister should be having in her place.'

'Papa,' said Frank, after a pause, 'I have been thinking, couldn't you get me into Mr. Rogers' office instead of John? it—it would be quite good enough for me. I would work hard.'

'I have no doubt you would. But, Frank, I think you, as well as John, are fit for some better lot in life than a country attorney, if such a lot be in any way attainable: if not, you may earn your bread as honestly, and be as true a Christian gentleman in a lawyer's office as in the Guards. Thank you for the thought, my boy—I don't reject it altogether; only for the present, I am glad to say, we need not think of it again.'

Frank stood still; but a great load had been taken off his heart. Oh, that hateful, dingy office! The impossibility of any diligence earning him a position of which he could be proud, making it as

abhorrent to this boy, as it had been to John himself.

‘There! that’s all,’ said Mr. Arnold, after a moment’s silence. ‘The school itself I have not quite decided on, but will tell you as soon as I have done so. Of course you know any of the large Grammar Schools are quite out of my reach.’

‘Oh, yes! I could not bear now to go to one of them: send me somewhere where I can work.’

‘And play, too,’ added the Vicar, kindly.

‘And be well bullied,’ said Frank, with a sort of revengeful satisfaction at at last finding some prospect of suffering connected with the plan, but a half smile at such a feeling flashing from his glistening eyes at the same moment.

‘Yes, and be well bullied, too. I quite agree with you that, to a boy of your temper, that is a very useful part of a public school education. I need not tell you, Frank, never to lift your hand against a weaker boy.’

‘I have done that once for all,’ said Frank, gloomily.

‘Yes, once for all, I am sure. Your mother and myself have both noticed how much gentler you are already with all the little ones. And so you are beginning to learn one of the good lessons we always hoped this accident would teach you.’

‘Oh, father!—’ but Frank stopped short.

‘What?’

‘You punish me so by your kindness. I—I can’t bear it;’ and he laid his head down upon his arms and burst into tears.

Mr. Arnold pressed his shoulder kindly for a moment and then left him, thanking God who had made trouble thus soften his son's heart and turn it to his father, who had once little expected such a blessing would ever be his.

'Can I do anything for you, John?' asked Frank, turning into the drawing-room immediately dinner was over.

'Oh no, not—'

'You do want me. I am quite ready.'

'But you were going out—'

'Oh, it will do later. Shall I read? This?' taking up a book lying by John's side, and opening it at the marked place, began at once.

John lay, not listening very attentively. Such a thing as this, Frank's tying himself to his side at a 'but' or an 'only' was constantly occurring—it made him feel very selfish, but how could he help it? Once or twice he had insisted on Frank's not remaining with him, his fetching some one else, or letting him amuse himself, and in spite of Frank's reluctance at being thus set at liberty to pursue his own plans, had persisted till he had carried his point. And what then? he knew his brother well enough to understand his constrained manner and heavy brow by this time; he was hurt and miserable, fancying John liked any one better than himself, or that he would not accept the small amends he could make for the great injury he had done him. The entrance of Mr. Arnold for the Greek lesson put a speedier end to the unwilling enthrallment of his brother than any excuse John could have devised, and

Frank having done his duty, went out with a light heart.

Where did he go? To Massing, walking along quickly and lightly—and where then? To Hall, the carpenter's, to whom he showed a letter—an old letter, one he had long had by him, Miss Campbell's careful plan and measurements of Robert's twisting table. If he could but get it done by Christmas Day.

Hall shook his head: 'Quite impossible,' all hands were busy, and would be, far into Christmas Eve. But Frank pleaded, and begged, and remonstrated—at last said 'It was for an invalid brother, the brother whom surely Hall must remember.'

'What, the little fair-haired gentleman? always about everywhere? Well, I did hear as he'd had an accident at school, and come home ill, but thought he'd been back long ago.'

'It was no accident at school. I did it,' said Frank, resolutely; 'and now I'd give anything to have this done by Christmas Day for him.'

'You should have come before, Master Arnold. Now, if you'd given us the order when you first came about the concern a month ago, you might have had it in a jiffey; work was so slack just then.'

'I could not have paid for it if I had ordered it, so you would not have thanked me much,' said Frank, rather dignified and affronted.

'Well, well; for that free, nice little gentleman, is it? He picked up my Marianne, when she fell down in the snow last winter. You shall have it, sir.'

And so Frank went home, happier than he had been since the twelfth of last August.

The Church decorations were to be got through in one day this year, Sunday intervening. Again one was left at home ! Oh, how his father, at least, pictured to himself the open, happy face, carrying sunshine wherever it went ; the little, active figure, now mounting the ladder to hold a wreath for one, the next minute somewhere else, helping another ! Mary had the same image before her too, and her eyes were so often dimmed by the thought, that she dared not raise them from her evergreens, for fear they might meet her father's and cause him fresh pain.

Mr. Arnold asked Frank to come and help them, and he came. It was the first time he had ever lent a helping hand ; and now, how different was his pale, set face, his dogged determination to be every one's slave, his incapability of taking any pleasure in the work, from John's alacrity in helping, and pleasure in the work itself. Poor Frank ! No one felt more than himself what a sorry substitute, in spite of all his pains, he was for John, the brother whose popularity had once so embittered him.

Yes ; and so he felt it must be through life. Let him work like a slave at school, would *his* father say, when he came home, ' So, Frank, I see you have not belied the promise of your home-life ? ' Would *his* mother ever lay his head upon her shoulder, and wet his cheek with blessed tears of joy ? Or, yes, they might ; but it would be because they were sorry for him, and must treat him fairly. Poor Frank !

All this he felt ; and so, when as they left the Church, Mr. Arnold said, ‘ Thank you for your help, Frank ; I don’t know what we should have done without your arms and legs,’ Frank said nothing ; but thought—how sadly few could tell—‘ Last year you had Johnnie ; and you did not *thank* him.’



CHAPTER IX.

FRANK AND JOHN.

Ye who have scorned each other,
 Or injured friend or brother,
 In this fast fading year ;
 Ye who, by word or deed,
 Have made a kind heart bleed,
 Come gather here.

Ye who have nourish'd sadness,
 Estranged from hope and gladness,
 In this fast fading year ;
 Ye with o'erburdened mind,
 Made aliens from your kind,
 Come gather here.

Let not the useless sorrow
 Pursue you night and morrow ;
 If e'er you hoped, hope now—
 Take heart, uncloud your faces,
 And join in our embraces
 Under the holly-bough.

CHARLES MACKAY.

ALL made Christmas Eve as merry as they could make it ; and that was very fairly so. The children had grown quite accustomed to John's state, and it no longer hushed their voices or restrained their mirth. Mr. and Mrs. Arnold were anxious that no silence nor pity of theirs should make them remember either. Frank was happy to think that Hall's rather clumsy fac-simile of Robert's table was safe, and paid for, in his room. John was quite

bright as the party re-assembled ; doors were shut, and curtains drawn. Every one had been so busy till the evening that he had been a little overlooked and dull ; and so many had hurried in and out of the dining-room, where, for that day he was, first for one thing, then another, forgetting to shut the door after them, that he had been shivering in the draught almost all the afternoon.

They were playing at some round game that Mrs. W. Arnold had sent one of her unknown cousins, when Marianne brought in the village blacksmith's bill.

'Fourteen and sixpence ; I have nothing but a little silver in my pocket,' said the Vicar, who was the head and soul of the game, and very busy dealing the gaudy, pictorial cards. 'Mamma, can you help me with a half-sovereign ?'

'I really have not a penny downstairs ; perhaps Miss Storey—'

'I will go and fetch it, ma'am,' said Bridget, rising.

'Oh dear, no. Frank, you're the rich man of the family just now. Lend me your half-sovereign, will you, till I next go upstairs ?'

'I—I haven't got it, sir,' said Frank, after a moment's pause, colouring deeply.

'Eh?—what lost it? Oh, well then,' hating even to appear to pry into the boy's secrets, 'if Miss Storey will just finish these cards, I'll run and fetch what I want myself.'

It was nearly ten that night before the games which followed were over, and so the Vicar read prayers before the children went to bed.

‘The first time my little Mabel has kept such untimely hours!’ said the Vicar, lifting the child up, and kissing her, as the maids left the room. ‘There, good-night, my precious!—that’s right, Mary, carry her off.’

In five minutes the room was clear—husband and wife alone.

‘What do you think Frank has done with all that money?’ said Mrs. Arnold, suddenly.

‘What, has it been haunting you? Well, it rather does myself; but I shan’t ask him; if he has spent it foolishly his own vexation will be shame enough; still—’

‘What?’

‘It did strike me, when I gave it him, how he—’

‘Clutched at it!’ said the mother, as the Vicar hesitated; then laughed at herself for using such an ugly word.

‘Well, all I hope,’ said the Vicar, ‘is, that it isn’t some foolish old debt it has paid; but there, let us forget all about it. I hate distrusting a boy behind his back.’

Meanwhile the two brothers were safe in their own downstairs bed-room. Frank seemed rather nervous and hurried as he helped John as usual, and John was so lighthearted he rather rallied him on his haste and uncertainty.

Frank smiled a little, then stopped in what he was doing, then produced from a dark corner the table—John’s table.

‘It is a Christmas present, John, if you will have it,’ he said, awkwardly.

‘Oh, Frank!’ was all his brother could say.

‘What? it isn’t quite so nice as——’

‘Oh, Frank, don’t cry it down: but—to—to think you have spent all your money on me.’

‘Why shouldn’t I do what I choose with it?’ asked Frank, rather roughly. Then kneeling down by John’s side, and grasping one of his white thin hands with both his own:

‘There’s no one I care for like you, John; if it had been papa’s twenty pounds you must have had it all.’

‘Oh, Frank!’ and John put his hand caressingly in his old, fond, childish way against his brother’s flushed cheek; he could not raise himself to kiss him, at least he feared not, and would not pain Frank by failing.

‘As if anything I could ever do,’—began Frank, fiercely, ashamed of the choking in his throat.

‘Oh, Frank, don’t; don’t make me think you only do it because you think you ought; it is so much pleasanter your doing it because you love me.’

‘I always have loved you—always,’ said Frank, and truly; ‘sometimes you made me hate you for a minute or two when you would be so good-humoured; and they made me hate you by loving you so much better than myself, but I did love, and I will love you for ever.’

And with this Frank had done with the subject, rose, busied himself with putting John’s things away, and would not hear another word of thanks.

‘John,’ said he, when the former was almost

asleep, 'you can say it was a present came last night; you need never say I gave it.'

'I don't like that,' began his brother, energetically, though but half awake.

'But I do, and it shall be. If I didn't care for you I might like a fuss made about it; as I do, it would spoil it all.'

'Such secrets make it difficult not to equivocate,' persisted John, boldly, though he felt Frank's heart was set on carrying his point.

'But I will have it so,' cried Frank, fiercely; 'you shall promise me; if you don't I will get out of bed and smash it to pieces now.'

John, who was not to be intimidated thus, laughed his old merry laugh at Frank's sudden outbreak.

'Don't laugh, John, I'm in earnest. Say yes, this minute, or——' and he sprang up in bed.

John heard nothing more, and almost thought he must be dreaming, when five minutes later he felt that some one was standing by his side.

'You, Frank! What?' he cried, half frightened; 'surely you never have spoilt it?'

'No; oh, no! But to think I could ever speak to you again like that.'

'Like what?'

'As I did when I made you promise not to tell about——'

'But I didn't promise now,' interrupted Johnnie, quickly; 'you see I am grown bolder—I am not afraid of you now.'

'You weren't afraid of me then, only of the disgrace you thought I might get in. Oh, if I had

not made you keep up, you might now have been quite——’

‘Please don’t,’ cried John, and both boys were silent for a minute or two.

‘Frank,’ said his brother, suddenly, feeling with his hand till he had found Frank’s, ‘you made me promise that once, I want to make you promise something now.’

‘What? But it will be something no good to yourself, I know.’

‘A great comfort it will be to me—that you will give up reproaching yourself about this.’

‘I—I never can.’

‘But you can to me. It does make me so miserable.’

‘Does it? But I never can leave off feeling it.’

‘But you can speaking of it. You know it was *not* your push ; only that unfortunate catching in the carpet. Frank, *do* promise me.’

‘Well, if you wish it.’

‘I do wish it. Brother, how cold you must be—you are : do get into bed again ! Only it is Christmas Eve—quite dark ; give me a kiss first.’

‘I’ve never kissed you in my life,’ said Frank, bluntly.

‘Oh, yes ; when we were little you have. Do so now, just to show me you can,’ said John, with a shy laugh.

His brother yielded : the cheek he put against John’s was not only cold but wet with tears.

‘And tell the whole parish if you like ; I don’t deserve any pleasure about it, so it’s only fair the little I had should be spoilt.’

‘Thank you,’ said John. ‘I won’t make any fuss, but I never can keep such a secret without letting it out, or saying something not quite true ;’ and at last the two boys ceased talking and went to sleep.

‘I had a present last night, mamma,’ said John, quietly, when he and his mother were alone for a few minutes after breakfast the next morning. ‘A table just like Robert’s ; I shall be able to write, and draw, and everything.’

‘You had ? Why from whom ? Papa ?—but he surely——’

‘No, not papa. Frank ; only he can’t bear its being known, so please not to say anything about it that you can help.’

‘How did he get it done ?’

‘At Hall’s, I think. Mamma, he has spent all his money on me.’

‘Poor fellow !’

‘Oh, mamma, if he would but cheer up and forget it ! He says he deserved no pleasure in giving the table, so I might tell who gave it. Could you fetch it in ? I think he is keeping out of the way on purpose that all the surprise may be over, and all the remarks made, without his seeing or hearing.’

Mrs. Arnold did as he asked.

‘Why, mamma, what’s that ?’ cried the Vicar, who had entered during her absence.

‘A present to John.’

‘What, yours ? Well, one must never say a woman cannot keep a secret again. But how did you get the pattern ? I’ve often longed for one for you, my boy, but thought nothing could be done

till Robert was here and Hall could have his table for a day or two to copy.'

'But it's *not* my present, Frank.'

'Not yours? Then it is only Mary's neat little mind and clever clear head that could have made Hall understand the intricacies—'

'No, papa, it was Frank,' interrupted John, proudly, thinking how he must repeat this unconscious praise to his brother, feeling that there was no one for whose approbation Frank so yearned as for his father's.

'Frank!' cried the Vicar in astonishment; 'Mary must have helped him then.'

'No, papa: why shouldn't Frank do it as well as Mary, if he chose?' asked John, almost crossly; then, in his natural tone, 'but he dislikes its being known that it is all his doing; you won't talk of it before him, will you?'

'But where did he get the funds? William's half-sovereign, to be sure. Oh, Annie'—to his wife—'what a lesson on prejudging!' and the poor Vicar was quite distressed to think of his suspicions of the night before.

'There, father, you see I can turn it myself—backwards, forwards, wherever I want. I shall never get tired of holding books again, and shall be able to write exercises and all.'

'Ah, Johnnie,' said the Vicar, much touched, sitting beside him, 'I was thinking the other day, one good was arising out of this evil already; Frank's heart was turning a little towards his father. But here is another—he loves and appreciates you, at last.'

‘Papa, he has always liked me.’

• ‘He took strange ways of showing it, John.’

‘But he did. You don’t know what fun we have often had upstairs together, or at cricket ; oh, everywhere nearly, except just here.’

‘In fact, except when I was by,’ said the Vicar, sadly.

‘Papa, you are as bad as Frank when he wont take what I mean as I mean it.’

Here Anna and Carry came in, and all the old surprise and explanations had to be gone through. Till church time, Frank kept out of the way, and by this time the subject was pretty well exhausted, and if Frank guessed what Anna meant by squeezing his hand all of a sudden, as they walked side by side to church, he did not much mind it. Anna was the only being whose sympathy was not painful to him.



CHAPTER X.

THE VICAR AT FAULT.

Whatever broils disturb the street,
 There should be peace at home ;
 Where sisters dwell and brothers meet,
 Quarrels should never come.

WATTS.

THE next day (Wednesday) the Christmas holidays first seemed to begin fully. John had a book quite to his liking—a volume of travels which Robert Merivale had sent him as a Christmas present ; and wheeling his table round, propping it up, and putting the book upon the slanting desk thus made, proudly declared himself above wanting any one to read to him the whole morning ; and, to his great pleasure, Frank went out with Harry, and remained out with him till nearly dinner-time. Then John owned his eyes were rather weary, and yet he did so want to finish the chapter ; his father laughed at him, and said he was as bad as a girl of seventeen with her first novel, but Frank seized on the idea, and was quite cross at Mary's seeming to think, after dinner, that it had been left open for any one to read what John wanted, and so offering to do so herself. He claimed the place as his, rather rudely. Two persons John's accident had, as yet, had little power to draw together—Mary and Frank. Mary had admired

with swelling heart her brother's courage in making his father tell his part in the fall, in the face of every one ; but the slight advance she had ventured afterwards to make towards the culprit had been roughly repulsed, and in daily matters two such characters only grated against each other the more harshly, as years and care developed them. Her powers of management irritated him, and reflected, *he* thought, on his mother's want of them : and Mary could not endure Frank's rough manners and careless ways. 'When Frank was really at school, there might be a chance of keeping the house tidy,' she had thought with a sigh, as she carried a pile of the miscellaneous articles he had left about, into his room, that morning.

This was the day that Mr. Arnold was to prepare Bridget for their parting at Midsummer, and he did not at all like the duty before him ; however, the sooner begun the sooner over, so, when dinner was ended, he asked her if she could spare ten minutes, and led the way into his study :—the scene this last half-year of so many interviews, more or less painful, that the Vicar began to dislike his old, peaceful retreat. He told his news very gently, but poor Bridget was none the less shocked and grieved.

'What have I done, sir ?' she asked in alarm.

'Done ? Nothing but what we like very much. No, we would most gladly have kept you till little Mabel herself were grown up, if such a thing had been possible, and you yourself willing to stay so long in the depths of a little country village—'

'Oh, sir !' interrupted Bridget, half reproachfully, half in tears.

‘But we cannot test you,’ continued Mr. Arnold, ‘because our own circumstances make it impossible for us to keep you with us after Midsummer. We shall not replace you; do not fear a successor. Mary will be as good a substitute as we shall hope to find—at any rate she will be the only one we shall have.’

‘Oh, sir, you do not mean it! you will keep me—’

‘No, we cannot; and will not. Mrs. Arnold and myself are quite as sorry as you can be, and I quite dread Anna’s grief. I hope in your next situation you will carry your power of winning your pupils’ hearts with you, as fully as you will our esteem and gratitude. And now I need not keep you longer, except to say that I think we will not spoil the children’s holidays by telling them of their impending loss, now. When the holidays are over I should wish them to know, for I don’t like family secrets, and such knowledge will incite them to make the most of their last half-year.’

But Bridget did not take the hint to go. Could Mr. Arnold mean to turn her out of a home, to which she was so attached, without giving her one chance of staying? Why had he not proposed to reduce her salary? What did she care if she had 50*l.* or 20*l.* after Midsummer? By that time John’s King’s College career would be over. She might, could, would stay on at Aggesden till, at least, Mary’s education was completed, for nothing. She looked up eager to make the proposition, but there was a stern dignity in the Vicar’s face which

froze the words upon her lips. 'I need not keep you longer,' he repeated rather coldly. But despair emboldened the young girl.

'Oh, sir, you must not consider it settled,' she burst out, almost in sobs. 'You have all been so kind, I love the children so, I could not bear to go to a fresh place—and—and,' blushing deeply, and looking on the ground, 'I—my—'

Mr. Arnold felt what was coming, and could have knocked the girl down for the pain and mortification she was about to cause him.

'I am glad our liking is mutual,' said he, going to the table and opening the inkstand, as if one business was over, and he must now turn to the next. 'Mrs. Arnold will be always most happy to hear from you ; and so will Mary and Anna, I am sure.'

Bridget was silenced for a minute. This was a humour in which she had never seen the Vicar yet, and his quietness and seeming displeasure awed and dismayed her.

'I—I must have disappointed you in some way,' she sobbed.

'No, nowhere—except in keeping me now,' he added, with a kind smile ; 'it is a painful subject, and will be a painful parting to all ; but one pain we can save each other, that of lengthening this disagreeable interview.'

Bridget knew she ought to go ; but she did not. Instead of doing so, she went up to the table herself, laid her trembling hand upon it to steady herself, and said more firmly than she had thought possible—

'If you would be so very kind, sir, as to allow me

to stay, at least till Christmas, I do not want—do not care for—any—sal——’

‘ But I do care very much to make use of any one’s services without remunerating them. I may have no choice about being a poor man, but I have about being an honest one ; and, in my eyes, to make use of your services without repaying you, and that fairly, *would* be dishonesty.’

What could Bridget say, but a half-frightened ‘ I beg your pardon ;’ or do, but leave the room and going to her own, have a good cry, not only at her unexpected grief, but having displeased the Vicar for the first time.

Meanwhile, Frank had left off reading, because John was distressed to think that he had never written to thank Robert for the book, as now, with his new table, he could so easily do ; and though now a letter, however short, could scarcely be written in time for to-day’s post, he could not be happy without putting one in train at once.

Frank fetched him pen and ink ; Mary objected to the ink-glass, as being very wide-mouthed, and therefore likely, if upset, to empty its whole contents, offering her own in its place, an offer Frank refused, adding, ‘ Pray why should it be upset ? and if it is, what business is that of yours ?’ Happily by this time John had spoilt his sheet of paper by a great blot, and wanted another, which Frank had to find him.

After the first few words, John found writing a much more wearisome task than he had fancied it would be. It took him nearly half-an-hour to finish one side of his paper, during which time Frank had

had three great blots to wipe up, the last of which had filled John's eyes with tears of weariness and vexation ; so exhausted was he with this new effort, so vexed at the untidy spectacle the page presented after all the pains he had spent upon it.

'There, John, you had much better let me finish it for you,' said Frank, good-naturedly ; and John willingly assented. His back, eyes, and hand ached, and, worst of all, his heart ached ; how could he ever draw—even write an exercise, if half-an hour of such work had so tired and vexed him, that if Frank had not been his helper he must have given up the exertion in despair after the first ten minutes.

'Now Johnnie does not want the ink,' said Mary, who, busy at work as she was, had been keeping an anxious eye on the ink-glass all the time ; 'do, pray, put it on the table.'

'I shall put it where I choose,' returned her brother.

'Anywhere but where it is,' said Mary, fretfully ; 'if Johnnie move, or you forget it and move the book, it will be down in a minute.'

'Well, and you'll be so pleased at my doing such a thing that I wont deprive you of the chance of such an accident occurring ;' and Frank, not a little to his own inconvenience, left the inkstand where it was.

'Frank, you must move it—you——'

'*Shall*. Eh ? Take care, Mary, I'm a little too old to submit to your imperious highness's rule any longer ; so don't issue commands you know will not meet with the respectful attention your six other humble slaves would pay them.'

John could not help smiling ; he was a boy himself, and though better able to appreciate Mary's usefulness than his brother, did not quite like hearing her so ready to order so big a brother as Frank.

Mary took up her work pettishly, and sighed ; whereupon Frank laughed.

Mary said, 'he was very rude.' Frank, 'he was much obliged for her valuable information ;' and then went on with the letter.

'Will you ask Robert—?' began Mary, after a long silence, and in not a very friendly tone.

'No, I wont : the letter's sealed ;' and he stuck the envelope down as he spoke. 'I shall run over to Massing with it at once, Johnnie, and it will go to-day, after all.'

John was wondering whether this was said to please himself or vex Mary, when Robert came rushing in, a ball in his arms.

'Just look, Johnnie ;' and up he ran to John's sofa.

'Get off,' cried Frank, remembering the ink, which he himself had no wish should be spilt ; but his push was too late, or Robert in falling caught at John's table, and down came table, ink, and all, Robert beneath them.

Mary almost cried with vexation. Frank picked up Robert, and finding him safe and sound, turned his anger upon his little brother.

'You little fool, you're always in the way !' he cried, roughly, pushing him towards the door.

'I want my hedgehog,' persisted Robert, struggling manfully in Frank's strong grasp.

‘You shan’t have it, then : get out ;’ and he dragged him to the door.

‘Why shouldn’t he have it, Frank ?’ remonstrated John : unfortunately the old peace-keeper could only interfere by words.

‘Because I don’t choose. Oh ! so you can kick, can you ? then take that—’ and Frank struck the little fellow, and then shut the door on him and bolted it.

‘I wonder, Frank, you can do such things !’ cried Mary, flushing with vexation and anger ; ‘it was all your doing, and then you bully Robert and hit a little boy eight years younger than yourself.’

Frank was already rather ashamed of this himself ; but his self-reproach only made him answer the more vehemently : ‘I tell you what, Mary, I wont have you interfering between me and the boys !’

‘You might at least help me to wipe up the ink,’ said poor Mary, who was down on her knees blotting up the black pool to the best of her ability. ‘Johnnie, do fetch a duster. Ah ! you can’t—then please ring ; of course, Frank wont do anything.’

‘If you asked him civilly he would ; but as you don’t try a young lady’s proper behaviour, he certainly wont ;’ and he walked to the window and whistled.

Marianne came with a duster, at last, and then, after ten minutes’ wiping and rubbing there was left a large dark stain, which in spite of his pretended indifference, Frank was almost as sorry to see as Mary herself.

‘Wont something take it out?’ asked John at last.

‘Salts of lemon might do something,’ said Mary, ruefully ; ‘a white patch, if it did take the colour out, would be better than a black one. If you are going to Massing, Frank, you had better get some at the chemist’s.’

‘Thank you. Has your highness any further orders I can execute?’

‘Here is threepence,’ answered Mary, too much hurt and vexed to have spirit to retort, or notice Frank’s taunting tone ; ‘that will be enough.’

‘Threepence too much,’ refusing to take it. ‘I am going to Massing to post a letter, not to be your errand-boy, I can assure you.’

‘Frank, you really shall!’ cried Mary, her eyes flashing ; ‘if you don’t say you will do it at once, I will ask papa to make you.’

‘And if you do,’ he shouted, ‘I’ll burn the stuff when I get home, before your very eyes.’

‘Oh, Frank!’ said Johnnie, who had meant not to interfere, but shocked and surprised into speaking now.

‘I will,’ returned Frank, doggedly. ‘You threaten me with papa, because you know he always takes your part, and you thought, I dare say, what a nice scrape you would have got me into, if I said I wouldn’t do it then ; but your revenge wont be quite so perfect as you hope for. I’m not going to disobey *him*, even to please you. Call him in, pray call him in ! Tell him *I* disregarded your kind warnings. *I* upset the ink. *I* turned Robert out

of the room, and hit him, and now *I* wont, at your bidding, do your little errands at Massing. I think altogether it may make him *rather* angry, so you'll have a little fun out of the business, after all.'

But as this tirade was brought to a conclusion, who should come in but the Vicar himself. They all looked and felt more or less caught and foolish. 'Why, what's this?' as he set his foot in the duster.

'The ink has been spilt,' Mary answered, and Frank disliked her the more for her generosity.

'Spilt? What that great mess made? You don't mean, Mary, that is all you can do to it?' asked Mr. Arnold, in some concern at the great black stain.

'All I can do *now*, papa. Frank is going to Massing; perhaps you would tell him to get some salts of lemon there. There is the money.'

'*Tell* him,' repeated the Vicar. 'Ask him, I suppose will do. It's a very lucky thing he is going, I am sure; what a horrid mess.'

'I did it,' said Frank.

'Not all, papa,' interposed John. 'My table was upset somehow. I have been writing to Cousin Robert, and Frank is going to Massing to post the letter for me.'

But Frank in his present humour had no wish to have his father's feelings enlisted in his favour, and repeated, sullenly, 'I did it. I knocked down Robert, and that knocked down the table.'

'You meant to save the ink,' said John.

'Hold your tongue,' said Frank, scowling.

'The truth is, I suppose, you have all been quar-

relling. Come, Mary, you're to be depended on ; what does all this mean ?

‘It began by—’

‘Oh, I don’t want to hear the quarrel. You are quite old enough to settle such matters among yourselves,’ said the Vicar, hastily.

‘I don’t know what you want, then,—about the salt of lemon ? Frank wont go unless you tell him ; and because I said I wondered how he could hit Robert as he did, he said, ‘If I asked you to make him get it in Massing, he’d burn it before my eyes when he came home.’’

Mr. Arnold half laughed at the threat ; but was a good deal annoyed, too.

‘Is it so, Frank ? I don’t care about this salt of lemon ; but that you hit little Robert ?’ he asked.

‘Yes, I did !’ answered Frank, calmly, without any shrinking or quailing of his fierce, firm eyes.

‘Only once, papa ! It was very provoking,’ began John, anxiously.

‘Dear John, you had better leave it alone. I am not going to return the blow, don’t be afraid ; but look here, Frank. No one has any right to strike a blow in this house but myself, and I wont have it done ; and secondly, as through you the ink was spilt, the very least you can do is to agree to buy whatever Mary wants, and to do it as a gentleman should, too.’ And so the Vicar left his sons and daughter, and Frank took up the three pennies, put them in his pocket, and walked off without a word.

Robert, seeing Frank go down the drive, came in for his hedgehog, and the poor, prickly creature was discovered still safe and unconscious under the

dining-table, whence Robert took it up tenderly, and found an admirer in John to his heart's content ; but John saw the little fellow had been crying, and felt very odd and uncomfortable.

‘ You weren’t much hurt ? ’ he asked at last, because he couldn’t help it.

‘ I didn’t cry at that ! ’ answered Robert, his face flaming, his tone indignant and resolute ; ‘ but because I was in such a passion.’ And John forbore to press his original question.

Mr. Arnold was more vexed at the little he knew of the afternoon’s disturbances, when he came to think them over. He feared Mary often aggravated Frank, almost as much as Frank did his sister, and this was no pleasant reflection ; and that Frank had raised his hand against a little one, after the severe lesson he had had on his proneness so to resent an injury without even waiting to see whether it were intentional or accidental, was a sad precedent. On second thoughts, irritated as he had been by more than one *contretemps* that afternoon, Mr. Arnold did not feel at all sure that the most effectual way of noticing it would not have been to have returned the blow in a way the boy would have remembered, sufficiently sharply to show him that his father was in earnest, and make him think twice before he bullied one of the children again.

Altogether the Vicar was dissatisfied this afternoon ; but more with his harshness to Miss Storey than his leniency to Frank. Nor did he feel at peace with the world or himself till he had been up to the Hall, to inquire after Lady Merivale, whom they had missed at church yesterday ; had a plea-

sant half-hour's chat with the kind, gentle old lady, and come home again to find his study fire still in, and himself in a fitter mood to go on with his sermon than he had been when he had shown the little governess so determinately out of his room two hours ago.

Not long after this Frank came in from Massing, and sat talking to John till candles came. He had met James Lee, and they had walked in and out together, and had just been in time for the post, which John had secretly thought he never could be. Mary soon followed the candles, her work in her hand. 'Have you the lemon, Frank?' she asked. 'I might try some before tea.'

Frank had no fault to find with her tone or manner; neither was either triumphant or cross.

'Did you think Cox would be out of it?' he returned. 'Here it is!' and he took it out of his pocket; and 'there it is;' and he flung it into the fire.

It was gone beyond recall—a little fizzing, a little flame, and the whole packet, salt and paper, were consumed.

'Oh, Frank, how wicked!' cried John, warmed out of all prudence.

'I said I would do it. Now you had better go and tell papa, Mary!'

Mary did not speak—did not raise her eyes from her work. 'Why should Frank so hate—so thwart her? Was she not mending one of his socks even now, when she had been longing all the afternoon to look at John's new book, whilst he was otherwise occupied, and did not want it?'

Poor Mary! one or two silent tears trickled down

upon her careful, even darn. John looked at Frank indignantly, and Frank only curled his lip, took up John's book, and went on with it to himself. John was boiling over with wrath against him, and longed to take it from him—or, at least, to fight it out in words; but their father, carrying Mabel, came in before Mary went to make tea, and angry as John was, he was too prudent to arouse another war of words between Frank and Mary.

Mr. Arnold sat playing with his little girl till tea-time, and both John and Frank began to wonder what he would say if Frank's deed came to his knowledge. John could not but believe that Frank had another packet in his pocket all the while, or must have imitated Mr. Cox's packet with common salt and blue paper, in order to tease Mary.

'Why, what is that?' asked Mrs. Arnold, pointing to the disfiguring black spot, as they rose from tea.

'That! oh, ink, my dear,' answered her husband. 'So, Mary, you can't do anything to it till to-morrow?'

'No, papa!' answered Mary, quietly; whilst Frank stamped inwardly at the question being so put that she could thus be generous enough to hide his doings, without even any equivocation.

'Really, I wish you would try, my dear,' pursued the Vicar, quite to Frank's relief.

'I really—can't, papa,' hesitated poor, blushing Mary.

'What, too busy at work?'

'No,' said Frank, boldly, he could bear it no longer, 'because she has not got any stuff to try

with. I told her if she made you make me get it, I'd burn it and—I did.'

Frank paused one moment before saying these two last words, there was something in his father's face before which, for one moment, even his spirit quailed, but when he did say them, spoke them defiantly enough.

'You call that obedience?' asked Mr. Arnold, sternly, seizing the boy's arm.

'Yes—you told me to get it and I did get it.'

'And burnt it to make your obedience of no worth, sheer, insolent impertinence! I told you also that no one had a right to strike a blow in this house but myself, and I will prove my right,' and Mr. Arnold struck Frank once, twice.—'Now go out of the room,—don't let me see you again to-night.'

Frank obeyed, he always did. Mary, thoroughly upset all the afternoon, burst into tears at this climax to the troubles. Anna followed her example in a far louder way, but was discreet enough to go and cry in the schoolroom. Johnnie, who had started up entreatingly, but impotent to say or do, poor fellow! lay changing from white to red and back to white again. The little ones were awed; Mr. Arnold himself took up the paper, and settled himself away from the children in his old place by the fire, not what had now become his more usual one by John's side.

CHAPTER XI.

THE VICTORY WON.

This is the place where God hath given sleep
 To his beloved ones ; long grasses wave
 Above them, and through branches woven deep
 A quiet sunbeam glides across the grave ;
 Here it is good for thee awhile to be,
 Oh, restless heart ! where nothing stirs or moves ;
 Where nothing is disquieted like thee,
 Where nothing sorrows, and where nothing loves ;
 Here it is good for thee to be, though now
 Where all is peace, thou come but as a guest,
 Soon thou wilt be a dweller ! Wait, and thou
 Shalt also rest !

DORA GREENWELL. *

AND what had Frank done ? Anna, as she hurried out of the room, saw him disappearing out of the front door. She ran to the door, opened it, and looked out ; the wind drafted in gustily, and extinguished the candle ; she called Frank, the wind only blew her voice back again ; she ran out into the drive ; one large drop after another fell heavily upon her, and before she had reached the gate it was pouring so fast that the poor child could do nothing but turn back again, and running upstairs, bury her face in her counterpane, and cry bitterly. She felt sure her dear Frank had now run away for good, and without even wishing her good-bye. Oh ! she should never, never see him again, and her tears flowed faster than ever ; but she did not this time

tell her father; Anna's spirit resented those two public blows, as stubbornly as ever Frank's could do; even the loving, warm-hearted little girl could not forgive them, far less expected Frank to do so.

The next hour passed heavily in the dining-room. Very angry and indignant at Frank's stupid, headstrong perversity was the Vicar at first; but as time passed on, and looking up from his paper, he met John's wistful, entreating, half-frightened glance, his heat began to fade away before his usual generosity and readiness to accuse himself of too great hastiness. He thought how little trouble Frank had these last four months given—how little of his old obstinacy he had shown, how gentle he had been to Johnnie—how obedient to himself—how he had spent all his money to give his brother pleasure. True, his old dogged self-will had broken out to-night as inexcusably as perhaps it ever had done yet; but were his late pains and progress to be at once forgotten? were hasty blows a fair way of punishing its exhibition in a boy of nearly fourteen? what could they do but harden and anger him further?

John's words yesterday—'Papa, you are as bad as Frank, when he wont take what I say as I mean it,' flashed back upon his memory. 'As bad as Frank,' ah, and in more ways than this one. Was the temper with which he had met Frank's fault any better than the temper that he had so hastily chastised? The Vicar was the first to cry 'Shame' upon himself and answer, no. Ah! he thought, Annie wonders whence Frank and Anna inherit their tempers; how can she see *my* hastiness and

determination to conquer theirs, and yet not know ? And the Vicar was right ; but all honour to Frank, if he ever grow into the patient, kindly, all-hoping man that his naturally self-willed, passionate father has trained himself to be, in the daily provocations which the boy, as yet, cannot, will not bear !

‘Give us a little music, will you, Mary ?’ the Vicar asked, at last, and then laying down his paper, sat in thought. Mary played on and on for nearly an hour unreleased, during which time the younger children went to bed, and was at last putting by her music unbidden, when Marianne entered with a waiter, and on it a packet she handed to her master.

‘What is it, Marianne ? who left it such a drenching night ; give the poor fellow some——’

‘Please, sir, Master Frank asked me to bring it to you,’ interrupted Marianne, and departed.

Mr. Arnold saw on the blue paper the label, ‘Salt of lemon ;’ he laid it down quietly, and leant back again a minute, shading his eyes.

‘Thank you, Mary,’ he said, as his daughter came back to her old place, and took up her work again ; ‘here is something to reward you ; Frank has been into Massing for us, so the least one can do is to use it at once.’

‘Oh, papa ! you will forgive him now,’ cried John.

‘If not, John, I don’t think I should be worthy to be a father,’ answered the Vicar, quietly and sadly ; ‘he has forgiven me as I fear I could not have forgiven my father in his place.’

Mrs. Arnold looked up, half frightened, half

indignant, at her husband thus speaking of himself.

‘I mean it, Annie,’ he said, calmly. ‘Frank’s offence was great, but there are not many boys of his spirit who, if such a fault had been punished as his was, would have had right feeling enough, notwithstanding the disgrace a boy finds so hard to bear, to have started on a six miles’ walk on a pouring night to rectify his transgression at once.’

‘I don’t know why you should say so, Frank,’ said Mrs. Arnold, reproachfully. ‘I am sure my only wonder was that you let him escape as he did.’

‘Such a boy as Frank, Annie, does not care for the bodily pain, but the bodily disgrace. How it would have angered and maddened myself in his place I dread to think. Well,’ more in his natural tone, ‘I must go and find him,’ and the Vicar left the room.

‘I never knew such a man as your father,’ said Mrs. Arnold, her eyes swimming.

‘Mother, there is no one like him,’ said John, stretching out his hand towards her.

‘He is a great deal too good for any of us,’ said Mary, sadly.

Anna, who had crept in again, swollen-eyed, during Mary’s music, too miserable to stay longer alone in the dark, only laid her head upon her book and burst into tears again.

But meanwhile the Vicar had not found Frank, either upstairs or down. All Marianne knew was that he had given her the packet and gone out again,

and where to seek him Mr. Arnold could not tell. Marianne said he had looked wet through, but when she asked if he would not stay and dry himself, he had answered that it was quite fine now.

And so, disappointed and self-reproachful, the Vicar was obliged to return to the dining-room, where Mary was already hard at work at the stain.

Where was Frank? Not, as Anna again feared, now surely on his way to Portsmouth or Liverpool, she did not know which, but where no one would have thought of looking for him, in the church porch, where he sat watching the again fast-falling rain, watching every now and then a light appear and disappear in the Vicarage bed-rooms. He little thought who was carrying that light, or for whom the bearer was seeking.

He scarcely knew how the next hour passed, or of what he was thinking; not of his father, restless and ill at ease at home; nor of Anna, upstairs, trying with atlases and books of geography to discover whether Portsmouth or Liverpool were the nearer to Worcester; not of Mary bitterly repenting her share in the misfortunes of the day, wondering sadly whether Frank ever would be friends with her.

About ten he went back into the house and through the kitchen to his own, now downstairs, bed-room. Here was Johnnie, as he had expected, in bed.

'Oh, Frank!' he cried, as if a load were suddenly taken off him by Frank's entrance, 'I am so glad—do come to me;' but Frank did not come, only sat

down by the empty grate, and put his feet upon the fender. John lay silent some minutes, he did not know what to make of Frank's steady, quiet face, obstinate yet hardly sullen silence ; and he feared to excite him to an outburst, though outburst there could hardly be smothered under so quiet a demeanour.

‘Frank, do come here,’ he said again at last.

‘You want me?’ asked Frank, first turning round.

‘Have been wanting you ever so long.’

‘Who put you to bed?’ asked Frank.

‘Papa.’

‘I thought he would. Well, then, I could not come sooner, John.’

‘Why not? Oh, Frank! he did not mean that.’

‘He generally means what he says,’ returned Frank, half indignantly.

‘Oh, not after you had done all you could to make it up ; he went out to look for you ; you have not seen him yet. Oh, Frank, do go to him.’

‘I am not going to disobey him again,’ said Frank, doggedly.

‘But it would not be disobedience when he has been wanting to find you. Oh, if I could only go.’

‘I am very glad you can’t!—not glad you cannot go,’ added Frank, eagerly, ‘but that he can’t know I’m in, and so none of my punishment can be spared me.’

‘Frank, how odd you are,’ said John, half frightened.

‘Odd, am I? I’m only very glad he treated me as he did.’

‘Oh, Frank!’ said John, shocked. This boy would have been almost heart-broken had his father ever lifted his hand against him.

‘Yes, I am glad: nothing is too bad for me; I am glad they were all there.’

‘But a great deal more glad you could so soon show you were sorry.’

‘Sorry! for what?’ asked Frank, fiercely.

‘That you had burnt——’

‘No, I am not sorry for that; I am sorry I vexed my father by doing it. If he had told me not, I would have broken my word ten times over rather than have done it, but that is all; I am not sorry for the actual burning it.’

‘What are you sorry for, then?’

‘That it so vexed my father,’ repeated he, doggedly; and no more would he say.

‘You are coming to bed?’ asked John, after a long silence.

‘I am keeping you awake? very well, then;’ and Frank began to untie his neckerchief.

‘Not if you don’t want to come; but you must be so wet.’

‘I think I’m nearly dry now.’

‘Oh, Frank; do come here! How can you be so cruel? You know I cannot come to you.’

Frank could not resist John’s entreating appeal; he went to the bedside, stood holding the candle, and looking straight into John’s wistful, perplexed face.

‘No, I have not been crying,’ he said, with a half smile, in answer to John’s anxious gaze.

‘I—I wish you would. Oh, Frank! do come nearer—put your head down by mine.’

Frank knelt down by the bedside. 'A little nearer;' and John could at last put his arm round his brother's neck.

'Oh, dear, dear Frank, how sorry I am!'

'For me? You needn't be—anything but for him to go on heaping coals of fire on my head, so—so wicked as I am!'

'No, no, Frank, not that,' cried John; 'if you had only heard what he said when Marianne brought it in, that he could never so have forgiven such a disgrace if he had been in your place.'

'Forgiven!' interrupted Frank; 'do you pretend to say he hasn't the right to knock me about as much as he pleases?'

'I only repeated his words,' said John.

'Oh, Johnnie, Johnnie! why didn't I run away? How can I stay, and let him be so patient, so generous.'

'Like as a father pitieth his own children,' murmured John; he hardly knew why, only his own words failed him utterly.

Frank knelt on and on, his head a heavy burden on John's arm—a thin arm, all too weak to bear him—but John would never have let Frank know the pain he was unconsciously inflicting.

'I must be tiring you,' he cried, starting up at last, 'and I'm keeping you awake, too. Good-night.'

'Frank, you will go to him? It would so comfort him; he has so much to bear.'

'He has, indeed! No, I am not going. I'll put my boots outside the door, to show I'm come in, if you like; I don't think he believes yet I mean never

to disobey him again. I wish he had not forbidden my running away.'

John did not answer; he was thoroughly oppressed, tired, and worried, and gave up attempting to cope with Frank's stubborn remorse—scarcely penitence. Thoroughly wearied out, the invalid's perplexities and troubles were soon cut short by sleep—'nature's soft nurse;' but Frank lay long awake, tearless, wretched, sick at heart, more deeply grieved than one of his nature could ever tell the world, that he had so seriously displeased his father.

The next morning, ill and upset as he was, he helped John into the dining-room as usual, and took his usual place at prayers, and breakfast. Mr. Arnold was almost as grave and depressed as Frank; and as soon as the meal was over, went across to the study. Frank settled himself as usual, in holiday time, to read to John, who let him go on till the breakfast party had all dispersed in search of work or play, and then said, entreatingly—

'Frank, do go to him.'

'I had rather read to you first.'

'Frank, how can you wait?'—almost fretfully.

'I shall be of no use to you afterwards,' answered Frank; 'I had better read first.'

'I could not listen to you if you did,' answered John, quite irritated; 'do give me the book, and let me read to myself now—you can read after dinner.'

'Oh, it is not such a very great treat to me to read such——' began Frank, bitterly, but stopped short. 'What have I said?—oh, John, I did not mean it.'

'No, I know you didn't; but if you want me to

forgive you,' with Mabel's tender, entreating smile, 'do give up reading to me now,'

Frank did consent—rose and went. John felt quite relieved when he heard the opposite door close behind him.

'Ah, Frank! I was wanting you,' said the Vicar, rising and putting aside his sermon. 'No!' he said, seeing Frank's look of misery and quivering lips, 'don't let us have any scene. You are sorry for your temper, I for mine; let us shake hands and be friends, and say no more about it.' The Vicar held out his hand, but Frank would not, could not, take it.

'Come, Frank, if you don't make haste, I shall have to make it a test of obedience,' said the Vicar, good-humouredly; 'surely, if I can forgive you, you can forgive your father.'

'I have nothing to forgive,' said Frank, gloomily.

'Yes, something, I think; so much as myself I will not pretend to say. Indeed, Frank, I will not conceal from you that, had it been punished in a proper spirit, yesterday's offence, if only from its deliberate premeditation, deserved far severer measure than it met with—but of this, as you repent your temper so thoroughly, happily no more need be said, and I insist upon your shaking hands now; and so this business was at length got over.

'Now, don't stay in with John, he has his sisters to look after him this week; go out, get a walk—something to cheer and refresh you.'

'Thank you, I had rather stay in, and be of a little use,' said Frank, despondingly, silent tears of misery falling, in spite of all his efforts, one after another, from his heavy eyes down his white, set face.

‘Then I must order fresh air,’ persisted the Vicar. ‘I was going to send Harry into Massing for some sermon paper, but shall send you instead ; or you can get Harry for a companion if you like.’

‘How much ?’ asked Frank.

‘A couple of quires ; eightpence a quire it is there. Here is the money. And now, my boy, if you love me at all, do look a little more as a boy should look in his holidays, when you come in.’

‘Love you at all !’ burst from Frank, in spite of himself ; ‘but no wonder you don’t believe it, when I——’

‘Come, we are not to have another word about that, except one word indeed,—I am afraid a hard one. You have scarcely really repented of all yesterday’s failings unless you can so humble yourself as to say some little word of apology to Mary, who, poor girl ! was as grieved as any one last night.’

Frank drew back, and up.

‘I do not *require* it,’ said the Vicar ; ‘a forced apology between brothers and sisters is nothing worth. But I know you are anxious to do your duty, and so it is mine to point out the only part of it which I think you have not faced—the test, Frank, by which you can try the real worth of all your other penitence.’

‘If you order it, sir.’

‘No, I will never order anything of the kind. Don’t do it because I wish it ; you would shrink from the hypocrisy ; wait till you can honestly say you are sorry so needlessly to have vexed her, but whilst waiting, pray to have the will and strength. Now you had better be off ; John will be wanting

you, I dare say, before you can be back, even now.'

And so Frank started alone, feeling as if his heart must burst if his father would treat him thus. Blows, reproaches were easy enough to bear, but such words, such counsels as these, broke the boy's spirit within him. Oh, how he loved and honoured their giver; how he longed to be such a man himself! To attain his father's gentleness, wisdom, long-suffering, and marvellous patience. These were his longings, but what were his deeds? Was such behaviour as that of last night the best compensation he could give? It seemed so.

Ah, Frank! that such aspirations had been kindled within you at all would have been compensation enough and to spare, for all your father's pains and patience, if he could but have felt sure they were felt,—save that he would have set before you a far higher example, that of One tempted in all things like as we are, yet without sin.

John read to himself for an hour or so, then thought he would practise the use of his sloping desk; Frank would be so grieved if he discovered what an effort it was to make use of his generous present for more than a few minutes together. He set to work to copy one of the illustrations from Robert's present, and grew so interested and eager in this new and delightful occupation, that he went on long after his back and hand were very tired indeed.

'You are sure you are not drawing too long,' said his mother, at last.

'Oh no, mamma; I must finish this.'

'Dear Johnnie, I can't help being a little afraid,' said Mrs. Arnold, after a pause.

‘Oh, mamma!’ cried John, very much disappointed.

‘You know if it did throw you back ever so little I never could forgive myself, Johnnie.’

‘Oh but, mamma, I’m sure it wont ; do you know I have felt so different the last three days, I do believe if you would let me try I could walk.’

‘I am afraid the wish is father to the thought, Johnnie,’ with rather a sad smile.

‘You mean because I don’t like giving up drawing? No, dear mother, I really do believe I have made a start ; I wish——’

‘What, Johnnie?’

‘That Mr. Jones could see me again,’ said John, repenting his speech the next minute.

‘You have had Mr. Willis, John ; still——’

‘Yes, and he is much the cleverer man—every one said so,’ answered John, cheerfully and he let go his pencil, laid his head back again and took up his books, wondering whether all the attention and indulgence he met with were not making him much more selfish and self-willed than he used to be ; else why had he argued about the drawing, and made his mother’s tone so sad and full of pity.

Frank passed the window before he had been reading ten minutes, and John hoped very much he would come in. Mary was practising, Anna out with Harry ; his mother had offered to read to him, but, after all, no one was quite like Frank. Frank, however, did not turn into the dining-room, but went first to the study—surely he would look in now ! No, he went to their own room. Now he must come ! No, he went upstairs. John felt vexed and disappointed ; then scolded himself for

thinking every one's first thought must, or at least ought to be, of himself. John little thought where Frank had gone, or what to do. He had gone to the schoolroom in search of Mary, his cheek crimson enough now. He went up bravely to the piano, where she still was.

'Mary,' he said, hoarsely ; 'I am very sorry for being so spiteful to you yesterday !'

His tone was so brave, so hearty, so miserable, the most revengeful nature, the hardest heart, could not but have been touched. Mary's were neither the one nor the other. Far too kind and generous, below the slight upper surface of too great self-estimation, not to feel at once that her brother was acting quite as bravely now as when, three months ago, he had stayed to hear the public proclamation of his own guilt.

'Oh, Frank !' she cried, her face flushing, her eyes full of sudden tears, 'never mind, I vexed you almost as much. I was so very, very sorry.'

'I can't say I shan't do the same again,' said Frank, and wisely, 'only I am sorry now !' And so he went out again, and now did go to John, who, as Frank sat and read to him, could not keep his eyes off his brother's face ; there was something about it he had never seen there before—something that kept one verse ringing in his mind : 'And all . . . looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel ;' and yet, how could such words apply to Frank ? Because he had endured a cross, despised a shame, before either of which many a more advanced, a more humble-minded Christian, would have shrunk and failed.

CHAPTER XII.

A WEEK AT DUTHOYTE.

Each day is given us a bridge to guide us
To thee across the deep, deep sea of time.

Morning Hymn.

‘**A** LETTER from Lady Duthoyte, papa!’ said Mrs. Arnold, as she emptied the post-bag the next morning; ‘the Worcester Paper, and that is all.’

‘Then I had better read mine out aloud, and let every one who likes think it their own.’

‘Duthoyte.’

‘DEAR MR. ARNOLD,—I know you have often thought of us all this Christmas, and we have very often been thinking of you, and now want to do more than think, *see* you. You know you promised to come before Christmas, only my tiresome cold kept me in Hampshire too long for guests to be possible. Will you come now? and bring with you some of my cousins. Can dear Johnnie be one? we should be so very much pleased to see him. If not, Frank and Harry, please, for we spent our Christmas with the children at Elton Merivale, and brought Hector and Harry back with us yesterday for a little change. If Mrs. Arnold could accompany you, I need not say how very glad my husband and myself will be to see her; but if, as we

fear, she cannot come, bring Mary. Of course this year our home must be quiet, but there will be a little going on amongst the tenantry, which I agree with dear Harry no private feeling should make us put aside. I was so glad to spend Christmas-day with them all. Oh ! if poor papa could but be persuaded to come home, or if I could relieve dear little Sophy, who never could bear leaving home even for a night. I tell Harry that is my only reason for wishing I did not marry when I did. He is quite well and so are all at Elton Merivale. Aggy so grown, and Hector is such a great big fellow that papa and Sophy will hardly know him. They are at Rome, now, and will be there, I think, for the next month or so. Lord Duthoyte joins me in kindest remembrances, and every good wish for this new year. How happy and how sad this last has been to us.

‘ Ever yours,

‘ ANTOINETTE DUTHOYTE.’

‘ Well, what is to be done ?’ asked the Vicar, as he laid down the letter.

‘ Oh, you go, of course, Frank,’ said his wife, eagerly, ‘ and Harry, if you like.’

‘ Yes ; Johnnie, I fear you could not ?’

‘ Indeed, papa, I had *rather* not,’ answered John, truly.

‘ Yes, and John cannot be left without either you or Frank,’ pursued Mrs. Arnold ; ‘ and, as to Mary, would you like to go ?’

‘ Very much, mamma,’ answered Mary, with far more eagerness than she often showed.

‘Well, then ; you, Harry, and Mary. That will be quite enough.’

‘I suppose you could not go, Annie ? surely now the children are growing up, and you would leave Miss Storey——

‘No, no, Frank, I cannot pay a visit to a Countess. Mary is younger and bolder.’

‘Oh, nonsense, Annie ; you see they will be very quiet themselves.’

‘Yes ; but indeed, like Johnnie, I had much rather not. Mary and Harry will enjoy the change, and I should like Mary to see a little life.’

‘Well, we will think it over ;’ and the Vicar put the letter in his pocket, determined that if any of the children went, Frank should not be left out.

Accordingly when he drove his wife that afternoon to call at Marshlands Rectory, the invitation and its acceptance were discussed thoroughly.

‘I don’t think John could do without either of you, and Mary away, too,’ said Mrs. Arnold again and again.

‘Oh, I think he could ; it would only be from Monday till Saturday at the outside, and Frank does need change so essentially.’

‘Well, yes ; but he will soon be going to school.’

‘In four weeks’ time,’ said the Vicar ; ‘no, Annie, you must let me have my own way here. These low spirits will degenerate into morbid, causeless, habitual depression, if we don’t take care. If he has waited so indefatigably upon Johnnie as to make himself almost indispensable to him, all the more reason that he should have a little holiday at last.’

‘Frank——’

‘Well, what?’ as she stopped short.

‘I do think you spoil that boy.’

‘Spoil him! Can you remember Monday night and think so?’

‘Well, but that was only once, and so sullen and ungracious——’

‘So bowed down by remorse as he is, poor fellow. It quite goes to my heart to see him. So unlike what a boy at his age should be.’

‘It is so like you.’

‘What?’

‘To make so much of the most disagreeable. I believe you would rather take Frank than Johnnie.’

‘Yes, as things are just now, I would much rather take Frank. He needs change; John is now very happy and contented, and I think it a pity to expose him to compassion and attentions that might awaken old longings and repinings.’

‘Then you mean to take all three?’

‘Yes, unless you want Mary, or think John will. Netta wont mind being taken at her word; both Mary and Harry have set their hearts upon this visit, I expect.’

‘Mary’s dress will want so much looking to,’ said Mrs. Arnold, thoughtfully.

‘Will it? then I fear we may have to decline it for her, poor child. I am very sorry, but we ought to incur no needless expense. Boys’ things always seem to do.’

‘Poor Mary; she would so like to see Duthoyte.’

‘And so should I like to take her. She plods on and on, in lessons and out, and has so few pleasures;

what sum would make her a presentable young lady ?

‘ I scarcely know ; everything she has is so outgrown. Five pounds, perhaps.’

‘ Then it must not be. She is very sensible and good, and will readily submit ; I will tell her exactly how it is ; if ever I am a rich man I will make it up to her. We will make some other journey together ;’ and the Vicar sighed and thought, ‘ Ah ! if my pen were bringing me in five pounds now and then, how much pleasure could such odd sums procure my wife and children.’

Mrs. Hughes was at home, and showed off her baby daughter with great pride.

‘ What ! Mr. Arnold had met Mr. Hatherton ? Was he not a good kind-hearted man ? He *was* Emily Susan’s godfather, but by proxy, for the day on which baby was christened had found its great-uncle laid up with bronchitis in his London lodgings. However, he had promised to run down and see his little great-niece as soon as he was well enough and could find a leisure day.’

‘ And be sure to send him on to see us,’ cried the Vicar.

‘ Yes, I will ; perhaps he will drive Emmie and myself over. I want her to make acquaintance with your little girls. Ah, do you know, Mrs. Arnold, we are expecting quite a houseful this spring and summer. John does not at all like the school at which my sisters are, and we almost think of leaving them here with a governess, at least for a time.’

‘ Mary will be delighted to have young friends

so near her, and Anna is always talking of Lucy Lee,' said Mrs. Arnold.

'And we shall be so glad they should have such friends as your daughters. They are dear, good girls, but no school is like home, and my father does not return for four years yet.'

Colonel Lee was in India.

Mr. Arnold always left Marshlands in good heart and good humour ; its mistress was such a pretty, pleasant little thing, and to-day made such a pretty picture with her baby daughter on her knees.

Mary did bear her disappointment bravely, but it was a severe one. Poor girl ! on more and more such sharp stones of poverty must she year by year set her feet, and that firmly, if she meant to be a happy woman in that state of life unto which it had pleased God to call her.

Harry was almost wild with delight at the prospect of dogs and horses, Hector and Harry ; Frank secretly longed to go, though, at first, all answer he made to his father's 'Well, Frank, we are meaning you and Harry to be my Duthoyte companions,' was 'Thank you, sir, but Johnnie—'

'Is going to begin to learn to do without you,' interrupted the Vicar ; 'we may trust him to mamma and Mary ; you will like to go I am sure, and I should like to take you, so it is all settled. Hector would not thank me for taking only little Harry ;' and so Frank, happily for himself, found he had no choice in the matter.

The next Monday the three started, the Vicar almost as much a boy as Harry—more so than Frank. And a very pleasant week the three had.

Lord Duthoyte left Mr. Arnold to his own pursuits, enjoying scarce books in the library, skating with the boys, or driving the young Countess in the morning, and in the afternoon devoted himself to showing his guest the lions of the village and its neighbourhood, once or twice having a few clever friends to meet him at dinner ; whilst the boys rode and drove, shot and skated, and were seen wonderfully little of by their betters, except at meals, when Frank came in bright and a gentleman, and Harry blooming with strength and happiness. The Vicar had no need to be ashamed of his boys, though they were not quite such fine, handsome fellows as their Merivale cousins.

‘ This is good news,’ cried Antoinette, looking up from one of Sophy’s long letters, the last morning of Mr. Arnold’s stay ; the Duthoytes had begged so hard that the boys should be left behind, the Vicar had consented. ‘ They are coming home ; Sophy says papa has suddenly changed all his plans, and they are to leave Rome the first week in February and be at Elton the middle of the month, and there papa means to stay till after Easter. Oh, how glad I am !’

‘ What a relief and comfort to poor Sophy !’ said her husband.

‘ Oh yes ; just see how the dear little thing has cried for joy over her letter ! I am sure those are two great tears. What a dear, good little thing she is.’

When the Vicar reached home, Mrs. Arnold met him with the same tale. Lady Merivale had written from town to enclose the few lines she had

received from her son, saying with the greatest clearness and certainty that the middle of February would find himself and Sophy at Elton Merivale, where he hoped his mother would join them as soon after their arrival as she could.

‘But Hector says nothing of coming here, then?’ said the Vicar, as his wife finished her narration.

‘No, nothing; Lady Agnes, you know, never liked the place. I am afraid, Frank, we shall have to wait till little Hector is married to see the good times back again—the Hall full of life and children all the year round.’

‘*Little* Hector! you would not say so if you saw him now. Such a tall, fine-looking fellow, so absurdly like his father! I do hope he will get into good hands, hands fit to mould him.’

‘So Frank and Harry were too happy to leave Duthoyte?’

‘Far too happy, and I really believe the other boys were just as unwilling to part with them as they to go. And how are you and dear Johnnie? Yes; I have had the pleasantest week in the world, but I am very glad to have you and the children again.’

If the husband were glad to see the wife, the father the children, wife and children fully returned this feeling. The Vicarage always seemed centreless and dull without its head, and little Mabel tried hard to make her father promise he would not go away next time without taking ‘his little sweet’ with him. But this the Vicar could no more promise than on his return from Clapham.

At the end of the week Frank and Harry re-

turned, and though Harry had only been more loth to leave Duthoyte and its delights at the end of two weeks than of one, Frank was, in spite of congenial companions and present enjoyments, almost eager to return to Aggesden ; he felt sure John must be wanting him, and he was right, though one tight little shake of the hand was all that passed between the brothers at first meeting.

The house seemed another thing with the two boys back. Harry rattled on, talking and laughing at once, all through and after tea till the Vicar's head, after last week's peace and quiet, was almost distracted ; however, he would not repress the boy's happiness, but laid down his book quietly and took to listening instead of continuing his vain attempts at reading. Frank, every now and then, joined in as eagerly, but generally checked himself ; with old scenes and faces former feelings and restraints arose, but notwithstanding this, no one could look at Frank and not see that his fortnight's visit had done him a world of good, cheered his voice, brightened his eye, taught him to look on those around as friends not enemies.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE GREAT GEORGE HATHERTON.

Are there not voices strangely sweet,
 And tones of music strangely dear?
 So lovingly the soul they greet,
 So kindly steal they on the ear!

* * * * *

Linked with the scenes of days long past,
 With all life's earnest hopes and fears,
 Linked with the smiles that did not last,
 The joys and griefs of faded years.

THE next day was Sunday. On Monday the Vicar kept Harry in lessons for a couple of hours, to sober down the vivacious spirits which, he feared, if they continued so high, must bring some trouble with them before the day was over. Dinner was rather late, and it was just two when, as the over-baked rice-pudding was being helped by the fairest, slenderest hand now in Worcestershire, there was a loud ring at the bell, a loud altercation with flurried Marianne, a good-humoured 'Well, show me anywhere till dinner is over,' and the Vicar started up, crying 'Why, it's Hatherton!'

'Don't bring him in here, Frank,' cried his wife, as the Vicar hurried out of the room; but too late, the next minute he was back again, and the author behind him.

'Annie, you remember George Hatherton—at least, by name. Hatherton, my wife;' and Mrs.

Arnold rose and shook hands warmly, with a grace and ease which her ruffled hair and untidy collar could scarcely mar.

‘You will stay and dine with us, Mr. Hatherton,’ she said at once, as if the boiled mutton had not been nearly demolished, and all but cold, before it had left the dining-room ten minutes ago.

‘No, thank you—no, thank you. I’m to be back in time for the six o’clock dinner at Marshlands—a little rice-pudding, if you please; that is just what I like. And so all these are your children, Arnold?’

‘Yes; but you could not remember their names if I told you them. The three eldest will do—Mary, Frank, and John.’

Now the drawing-room was uninhabitable without a fire, Johnnie stayed all day in the dining-room.

Mr. Hatherton nodded to Mary and Frank, but rose and leant over Johnnie to shake hands, and say a few kind words, when he found that ‘John’ was the crippled son of whom his old friend had told him. Mr. Arnold watched his quick movements a little anxiously; but the gentle tone, the compassionate voice, the kind interest the great author used towards and took in the Vicar’s ‘son of sons,’ drew him more closely to his old friend than ever.

Mrs. Arnold watched him, too, and was likewise drawn towards him. Yes, she was sure the great George Hatherton recognised at once, notwithstanding all the disadvantages under which her boy was seen, the sweetness of his face, the beauty of its features, the charm of his quiet, gentlemanly bearing;

the straightness and manliness of the limbs, now, alas ! so long unused.

There was no lack of conversation till dinner was cleared away ; but often and often Mr. Hather-ton's eyes turned towards John's sofa, and a soft, pained expression replaced for the moment his usual loud good-humour, and he did not at all like being turned into the drawing-room when the party broke up. Here the fire was lighted—thanks to Mary's having had presence of mind to run out, and light it in the very first confusion of his arrival, a promptness her father admired, being very glad to leave the odour of mutton and rice behind him, and to have the prospect of a quiet chat, away from the host of noisy children still in the dining-room.

Very soon, however, the two old friends went out for a walk, and Mary began to fear her precipitancy had been extravagant, being too ready to judge (as we all are) every act of our own or others by its *issue*, not its *motives*. So the girl was quite relieved to hear, half-an-hour later, a carriage drive up, and it made her quite bright the rest of the day, to think how neat and comfortable the drawing-room had been when Mrs. and Miss Wills were shown into it.

Mr. Hatherton came in again, soon after four, to say good-bye ; and then the Vicar said, ' Annie, I want you to help to persuade Hatherton to spare us a couple of nights. He owns, though leaving Marshlands to-morrow, he has a spare week before him.'

' Indeed, I hope you will give us the pleasure of seeing a little more of you,' responded Mrs. Arnold,

graciously ; ‘ that is, if a houseful of children does not prevent the pleasure being reciprocal.’

‘ Oh dear, no ! Frank’s eight together cannot be so bad as Mrs. Hughes’ baby. Oh dear, how that child cries ! I could not have believed a thing not twenty inches long could have so upset and annoyed a whole house. Will you really save me from that child’s screams a night or two ? I was meaning to run back to town to-morrow ; a fourth night of it would have killed me.’

‘ No, *I* can’t hear a word against babies,’ returned Mrs. Arnold, brightly ; ‘ and I can assure you, some of our own eight are scarcely more than this themselves. Take care you are not rushing from Scylla into Charybdis ; but, if you will venture yourself amongst us, we can promise you a very hearty welcome.’

‘ Mrs. Arnold is exaggerating,’ said poor Mr. Hatherton, in perplexity, turning to his friend.

‘ Indeed, I can’t bear witness as to comparative noise,’ answered the Vicar, ‘ seeing the only time I have seen little Miss Hughes, she was the quietest and happiest young lady in the world. But come, Hatherton, be a man of spirit, and take the venture. To-morrow, you say you can come. Well, if the next morning find you distracted, I will undertake to drive you to meet the quarter-past nine train myself, and we wont consider ourselves at all badly used ; or, what is saying a good deal more, any insult cast on our children.’

‘ Yes, Mr. Hatherton, you had much better come and give your old friend such a pleasure as has not been his for a long time,’ said Mrs. Arnold, per-

suasively—and there was no resisting Mrs. Arnold when she chose to be gracious and winning.

So Mr. Hatherton agreed to be with them by five the next evening, and Mary was already making a mental list of the many household wants the advent of a sleeping guest would make necessities, before the future guest had in good earnest begun his present farewells. He kept John's hand longest, looked wistfully into his fair, young face, and the tears that stood in the strong, hearty man's eyes, as he turned to bid good-bye to the host of little ones around, surely did him no dishonour.'

'What a pleasant fellow he is!' cried the Vicar, as he came into the dining-room, more than an hour later, after having walked half the way back to Marshlands with his friend. 'Well, but Annie, we are in for it. Why, when did we have a guest last? I really believe not since poor Tom was here, just before sailing for Melbourne.'

Which Tom was the Vicar's only brother, and had cost him many a heartache he might very well have been spared, as well as many a pound he could very ill spare. Tom was not bad-hearted, but a wild, careless, good-natured fellow, who had lost his father whilst still a boy, and had been spoilt by the widow, who, after being a conscientious, but, if anything, severe mother to her elder son, lavished everything on this son of her comparative old age, who in return had hastened the poor mother's journey to her grave. Five years ago, wearied of his own reckless courses, Tom had applied to his long-suffering brother to help him to Australia, promising faithfully that, once there, he would sink

or swim by his own exertions alone, and never ask Frank for another penny—a promise which to the Vicar's surprise Tom, though suffering many hardships and disappointments, had hitherto kept, nay, had even returned a five-pound note, which the Vicar had felt he might have the pleasure of sending 'poor Tom,' after a very bountiful harvest, when the corn on the glebe lands had been the envy and admiration of all the neighbouring farmers, abundant as their own crops were.

'Yes, Frank,' said his wife, now, in answer to Mr. Arnold's remark; 'I really am already half-repentant; I know how those town-bachelors live—how Hector did. I am afraid our little rooms, and plain fare, and all the discomforts of a large household, will make Mr. Hatherton wish to run away on Wednesday morning, though I fear he will be too polite to do so.'

'Well, we can't enlarge our rooms for him, I own; but Miss Storey will keep some of the children quiet, in here, till their bedtime, I am sure; and as for plain fare, a man who enjoys rice-pudding can't be so very hard to please; and for other discomforts, if you could but make Marianne punctual, and a little neater in personal appearance, I don't see why there need be any.'

'Really, I do think Marianne had better go; she has never been neat or punctual since we had her,' answered Mrs. Arnold, listless, yet out of patience. 'I have spoken to her again and again;' and Mrs. Arnold leant back in her chair, never reflecting, 'Example is better than precept;' for with no one to point out their failings, it is wonderful into how

many a grown-up man or woman may insensibly fall, so one must not be too hard on a woman, brought up in a household where servants were many, and it was no part of the mistress' duty to keep the servants up to theirs; where ladies'-maids were abundant, and notwithstanding the school-room lessons in work, Anna Merivale had never had to spend one thought upon her dress.

'Some things we shall want, mamma,' put in Mary, eagerly, afraid the subject was drifting away from the needs upon which her head had been running ever since Mr. Hatherton had left them.

'Come, Mary, you must not make too long a demand upon my purse,' said the Vicar, good-humouredly; 'it is very far from heavy just now, I must warn you.'

'Only, papa——'

'Well, what?'

'The spare-room jug has no handle. I have mended it; but it wont hold together when one takes it up, and——'

'Well, all such claims are legitimate; cut off the luxuries and leave only necessities, such as a jug one can hold, and I can't quarrel with you. There—I give you and mamma full leave to make all such necessary purchases. Make Mr. Hatherton's room as pretty and comfortable as you can, Mary, there's a good girl.'

And Mary did do her best; darned one hole in the curtain, another in the counterpane, washed the dusty, almost forgotten chimney ornaments, and left the room, the following list neatly written in pencil in her hand:—

‘Water-jug and soap-dish.

‘Window-blinds, 4 feet by 2.

‘Worsted to darn carpet.’

And the Vicar and Thomas being equally busy the next morning, and Mary, seeing the blinds had to be made, and the carpet darned before five, in a fever to go into Massing for these commissions before dinner, actually Frank, keeping his eyes steadily on the book he had been reading, said gruffly—

‘I can drive you in, if you like,’

‘Oh, will you?’ cried Mary, her tone a little too surprised and eager to be quite complimentary; but then Frank did not care for compliments; ‘oh, thank you. Could you come at once?’

‘This minute; I’ve nothing to do,’ said Frank, anxious to stop her gratitude.

Mary ran up to dress; Frank was reading on, when a little, soft fair face, stretched up close to his, and Mabel said in her most coaxing of tones—

‘Will you let me go with you, Frank?’

‘Oh, yes,’ answered Frank, readily; ‘will you like it?’

‘Oh, so much!’ and off the little girl ran, and kept up such a pretty pleased chatter from the back seat all the way; ‘Frank, what is that?—oh, dear Frank, is dat a wobbin?’ neither Mary nor Frank had time to feel shy or awkward, as both had, after the first offer, very much feared they must feel throughout the whole drive.

Coming back, Frank soon had Amabel over into the front seat on his knees, let her hold the whip, and pretend to drive; tried to teach her to hold the reins, and had the soft, fair, rosy cheek close to his

own older, more careworn one, all the way till they reached the Vicarage.

‘There, *I* must get down and open the gate ; Mary will take care of you, Mabel.’

‘Why not Mary open the gate?’ and Mabel would not be put down, at least by the gentle force the great boy was exerting to effect his purpose ; ‘see, little Bill is coming.’ And as ‘little Bill’ was holding the gate open before more words could be said, Frank had no excuse for depriving his father of the satisfaction of seeing the pony carriage pass the window, his ‘little sweet’ on Frank’s knees, and her face, full of smiles and blitheness, turned up with some coaxing saucy speech into his son’s dark, yet softened countenance. Mary darned the carpet immediately after dinner, and then worked with brisk sure fingers at the muslin blinds, having asked Miss Storey to let her, this afternoon, do her lessons later ; a request Bridget had not the slightest hesitation in granting. Mary’s lessons were always done, and well done, even under very adverse circumstances.

By half-past three, the blinds were up ; Mr. Hatherton’s room apparently ready. Mary went round to make sure nothing had been forgotten, and finding water-jug and decanter empty, carried them down with a sigh, filled them, and brought them back again. How she wished she could be housemaid one week ! Perhaps one day would have sufficed to disabuse her of this longing.

Then she ran down to the school-room, read German, practised an hour, wrote an essay on the reign of Queen Anne, in which her ministers were

very severely handled, nor did her late Majesty herself escape much better, Mary being just at the age when the halo of misfortune, grace, and intellect surrounding the elder Stuarts made the little woman a violent Jacobite. She was beginning to learn the next day's lessons by a tallow candle and a fire almost out in the school-room, long since deserted by all but herself, when Mr. Hather-ton's loud bell again resounded through the house, and Mary only waited till Marianne had at last answered the bell, and the guest had been shown into the drawing-room, to run out and see if the kettle were in a fair way to boil, and then hasten upstairs to make herself quite tidy.

A very nice looking young lady it was who entered the drawing-room ten minutes later; no one would have guessed those fair, young hands had that afternoon darned a carpet, only five minutes ago, filled the preserve glass and sugar-basin, and taken a scuttle of coals from Marianne to enable her to bring in the tea-tray the quicker. A year and a-half had greatly improved Mary Arnold since we first saw her, a tall, angular, unhealthy-looking girl, at Bridget's first arrival. She was three inches taller now; but though still neither plump nor comely, not nearly so thin in proportion to her premature height, as then. Thinness was becoming slender-ness—paleness, fairness—and though lacking her mother's winning smile and easy grace of tone, manner, and motion, Mary was fast becoming a delicate, more than ordinarily nice-looking girl, whose composed movements, smooth, pretty brown

hair, and quiet sensible mouth it was a pleasure to look at and watch.

Mr. Hatherton looked at her as she entered, and thought, 'No more to be compared to her mother than—! Why are daughters never equal to their mothers?' Why? because 'tis distance lends enchantment to the view.' Mr. Hatherton's vision of Anna Merivale, as he had seen her twenty years ago, was one of matchless grace and sweetness—a slender, lovely woman such as he had never seen again: he forgot that, leaning against Sir John's doorway and admiring her to Frank Arnold as he did, he had made his old friend quite angry by adding, 'but she does so want spirit and animation.'

'Spirit and animation!' had Sir Hector's tutor repeated, indignantly: 'do you mean you wish Miss Merivale to lay herself out for admiration like that handsome, bold Lady Caroline Ward, for instance?' pointing to the rival belle of the room.

'No, no, of course; still I do long somehow to give her a good shaking;' whereupon Frank Arnold had looked as if he 'did long' to strangle the speaker.

Yes; and not only do such criticisms fade away before the love, acquaintance, or merely the mist of years; but how can daughters equal their mothers till this mist of years lies between themselves and the acquaintance of their youth? or they themselves are mothers, and as mothers have gained that gentleness, forbearance, love, and charity which only the troubles and trials of married life and motherhood can give?

Tea was soon announced, thanks to Mary having seen Marianne with only the urn to bring in before she left her, and the elders adjourning to the dining-room, found Bridget and the four youngest children. The tea was a merry one. Mr. Hatherton would have Mabel next him, and made desperate love to her all through the meal, puzzling and perplexing, and yet pleasing the little girl, whom he did think worthy of being Miss Merivale's daughter ; *pleasing* her—for let any one watch even a boy and girl of three together, and deny, if they can, that an innate feeling on the young lady's part does not make the attentions of one of the superior sex, even at the tenderest age, both exciting and acceptable.

After tea, Bridget and the four youngest children stayed behind, Mrs. Arnold apologizing in her gracious courtesy for so banishing the little governess, who might well think tearfully of the many little hardships which, unknown to her at Aggesden, must, she was sure, await her elsewhere.

As soon as Carry and Robert were gone to bed, Mrs. Arnold hoped Bridget would join them in the drawing-room.

John had been settled in the drawing-room early in the afternoon, and lay bright and amused, watching and listening to the merry flood of noisy talk and merriment which Mr. Hatherton never let ebb for a moment. When Bridget came in, a little before eight, there was a lull, which the guest broke by asking Mrs. Arnold if she would not give him the pleasure of hearing her sing again.

'Oh, indeed, Mr. Hatherton, I have given up singing long ago,' answered Mrs. Arnold.

‘Impossible ! such a lovely voice. Now, Arnold, is that true ?’

‘Very nearly, not quite ; Annie sings to me once or twice a year as a great favour ; let to-night be one of those nights, Annie ; give us that old ‘Isle of Beauty.’’

Mrs. Arnold had really no wish to sing ; she was as free from vanity or conceit as most women, but still was not quite willing to mar the pleasant vision of perfection which her guest had evidently carried with him of her singing all these long years.

However, her husband pressed her till she yielded ; and her voice might be a little gone, both voice and hand very much out of practice, but there was still a charm about Anna Arnold’s voice and touch which few singers or players possess. Voice and touch were both so finished, so perfect, the best taste available had been lavished in cultivating and improving a great natural gift.

Then Mr. Arnold sent his daughter to play, and during the piece which followed, Mr. Hatherton talked more than the young player quite liked, and Mary finished it off rather in a huff. No more music was attempted : by this time it was nearly nine, the four elder children went to bed, general conversation occupied their betters till ten, and prayers, and Mrs. Arnold and the governess left the two old Oxonians to their own devices.

‘Ah ! do you remember ?’ began the Vicar, when he had made the fire roar famously, and he and Mr. Hatherton were comfortably seated on either side of it.

‘No ; I can’t remember anything just yet. Tell me all about that boy.’

‘What boy ?—Jem Moore’s ?’

‘Pooh, pooh ! nonsense ; your own, to be sure. Johnnie, you call him. How old is he ? how long has he been kept so ? how did it come about ?’

And so the Vicar told the whole tale of John’s life—yes, all. And Mr. Hatherton listened with interest and sympathy which never flagged, even at the one or two stray anecdotes of John’s childhood which the father could not help telling his old friend. True, when it came to the events of the last autumn, Mr. Hatherton leant back and shaded his eyes as if from the fire, but this was burning low, and his change of posture was not from any failure of interest in the latter part of his friend’s tale.

‘So the other boy did it ? Poor fellow ! no wonder he looks after him as he does in that cold, quiet way of his ; poor fellow ! I don’t know how it is, Arnold,’ and Mr. Hatherton rose and walked to the table ; ‘there is something about that boy—John, I mean. I can’t keep my eyes off him ; something so like my vision of my mother.’

‘It is a very sweet face,’ said the Vicar, one need not say, from his heart.

‘Eight-and-thirty years ago she died. I was ten, just ten : how often I have tried to recal her, and could not, though I knew I had her image if I could but force memory to restore it to me. That boy—there it all is—the bright yellow hair, pure fair skin, sweet half-sad face. God bless the boy !’ he cried, sitting down again. ‘Arnold, something shall be done for him.’

‘One cannot hurry time,’ answered the Vicar, calmly ; he was learning to bear the blasting of his once bright hopes as a man should bear them. ‘Time, Willis and all agreed, would do all that could be done.’

‘Willis ? Reeves Willis ? then you have had the best advice ?’ asked George Hatherton, his face falling.

‘Yes, the very best : so far the boy’s going back to school, hurt as he was, was a mercy. The best advice was at hand. Old Mr. Williams, here, might have gone pottering on for months, little thinking the injury possessed of the importance that London advice recognised in it at once.’

‘What a dear fellow he is ! Arnold, I’d almost be a married man, and have four sons and four daughters, if such a boy as that were secured me. Yes ; even as he is. Did I say, ‘God bless him ?’ yea, as old Isaac says, and he shall be blessed.’

‘Thank God he is blessed—to himself—to us all,’ answered his father, grasping his old friend’s hand ; ‘yes, you are right, Hatherton, one can never be grateful enough for having such a comfort at all ; better so maimed than never known ;’ and then the two friends sat in silence till the fire burnt down, the room grew chilly, and the candles began to flicker in their sockets.

And from the time the Vicar repeated that night’s conversation to the mother, his wife became the warmest admirer the author could boast in Worcestershire, not only of his character, but his works, —even those she had never read.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TWO TALES.

Say, what shall my song be to-night ?
 And the strain at your bidding shall flow ;
 Shall the measure be sportive and light,
 Or its murmurs be mournful and low ?

Song.

THE next morning Mr. Hatherton had a fire in his room and wrote ; downstairs, lessons in school-room and study went on as usual, except, which was not very usual, Harry was set an imposition—for distracted carelessness, nothing worse—and so, when Mr. Hatherton was ready for walking after dinner, the Vicar had to beg a few minutes' grace to attend to Harry's lesson ; he would not have left an imposition hanging over the bright little fellow till the next day, to accommodate any friend.

Mr. Hatherton, however, was not at all discommoded, rather pleased by this little delay, for, Harry being called off, he found himself alone with Johnnie, and shutting the door with a decided bang, which seemed to say, 'not to be opened till I come out,' sat himself down beside the young boy.

'You don't suffer pain now ?' he began, abruptly, after a minute or two's silence.

'No, not at all, thank you. I am sure I *am* getting better,' with a smile.

‘Your father said you saw Reeves Willis a month or so back, and he told you to go on with this system for ever?’

‘Till I felt decidedly better—a year or two, I hope;’ but John could not needlessly enter on the great disappointment of his life.

Mr. Hatherton sat silent a moment.

‘If you please—’ began Johnnie, colouring very much.

‘What? what were you saying?’ asked Mr. Hatherton, suddenly aroused.

‘I don’t quite know if I ought to ask it, sir, but I cannot help it; I may never have the opportunity again.’

‘Well, what?’ as John hesitated, then ceased speaking altogether; ‘there are not many things I could refuse you, my boy.’

‘I thought, sir, as you wrote so much, you might—’

‘Be able to put something of your own in print? What, are you an author already?’ with a kind but pitying smile; ‘very pretty they may be, but still I cannot advise you to rush before the public.’

‘The public, sir!’ repeated John, lost and bewildered.

‘Oh, you only wanted me to look at them, perhaps,’ continued Mr. Hatherton, evidently greatly relieved, ‘what a pleasant occupation it must make you.’

‘It?’ repeated John, again; ‘I don’t think, sir, you quite understand me.’

‘I thought you had been writing something, prose or verse, on which you wanted my opinion,’ answered

Mr. Hatherton, with characteristic straightforwardness.

John laughed, then coloured, and said hastily, 'I beg your pardon, sir, only I never had thought of any such thing—it does seem so very funny.'

'Why, my boy, not so very funny to me, for your father wrote some of the prettiest things I ever saw, when only three or four years older than yourself.'

'Did he?' cried John, eager and delighted.

'Yes; graceful, sensible, and pure his pieces always were, burnt long ago, I dare say; Arnold never would think enough of himself. Well, but what were you going to ask me, my boy?'

'Whether you would let me do some copying for you: that is, sir, if your tales want copying,' added John, afraid he had been rude in so readily concluding they must do so.

'Copying! Why, my boy, you've no idea what wearisome, worrying work copying is! It nearly made me give up writing once—before I was well known enough to be able to afford to pay a person to copy out my rough, careless first writing out of any idea.'

'Then your tales are copied fair?' asked John, his face bright.

'Oh, yes!' answered George Hatherton, laughing; 'I should pity any poor printer set to work on my loose blotted sheets.'

'And could you let me do some, sir?' as if it were the greatest favour in the world.

'Let you copy! one sheet would dispel the illusion, my boy.'

‘Oh, but, sir,’ the fair young cheek scarlet, ‘I meant pay me, too.’

‘Why John?’

‘You pity me very much, sir; but, oh! I should not mind lying here all day long if I could be of any use, if I did not feel so afraid I must be a burden and expense to my father all my life, instead of helping him as I felt sure I should before——’

‘Before this accident? Ah, you were to have gone into the army.’

‘There is still a little chance of it,’ answered John, smiling bravely.

‘Is there? ah, yes! so Arnold told me—only this last opinion——’

‘I can’t help hoping Mr. Jones’ is the right opinion still,’ said John; ‘I am sure I am much better than when Mr. Willis was here.’

‘You would like Mr. Jones to see you again?’

‘Oh, sir!’ was all John could answer, his eyes full. He thought, as he had thought of another longing a year ago, ‘but I know it can never be!’

‘You *would* like it?’ persisted Mr. Hatherton.

‘Oh, it would be such a comfort,’ burst from the boy in spite of himself; ‘but please don’t mention it—don’t let papa know I have ever thought of it.’

‘And why?’

‘Because it can’t be done, sir.’

‘You mean you could not go up to town?’

‘I think I could do that—only, you know, we are not rich, and I ought to be contented with Mr. Willis’ opinion.’

‘Why *ought*, if you are not? Not rich! no;

but looking after such an injury as this is the very highest claim on one's means that any man can have.'

'Will you let me earn the means, sir?' asked John with a bright entreating smile, after a moment's awkward shyness.

'By giving you a tale to copy? Oh, my poor boy!—well, if you wish it.' And Mr. Hatherton sat in thought. 'I tell you what, John,' he burst out, suddenly, 'you *shall* see Mr. Jones, and that to-morrow. I'll take you back to London with me.'

The bright colour on John's cheek suddenly faded, then rushed back again as he tried to say, 'Thank you;' but the words choked him.

'I have frightened you. I am so rough and awkward,' spoke George Hatherton, tender and contrite in a moment; 'but we *will* do it all the same. You will trust yourself to me? if you can't, you can have no idea how I love you, nor how you remind me of my mother.'

'Oh, sir!—it is so very, very kind!'

'You will come?'

'If my father and mother——'

'Oh, they *shall* let you. There, it is all settled; you shall stay with me as long as you like, and can be happy from home, and I'll set you to work to copy a tale and pay for your journey back, the very morning after your arrival, if you like.'

'Oh, thank you; but I don't think I could, please, be very long away.'

'You would be so missed?'

'I was thinking'—a little ashamed of his selfishness, 'I should so miss them.'

‘Ah, to be sure ; well, whom would you like to have with you ?

‘Oh, no, sir ! I did not mean that,’ answered poor John, aghast at having seemed guilty of such encroachment.

‘Ah, but *I* mean it,’ persisted Mr. Hatherton ; but here the Vicar looked in, and the author hurried off, leaving John in a flutter of hope and expectation ; oh ! surely his father would let him go ! he was so sure Mr. Jones would think him better.

‘I say, Arnold,’ began Mr. Hatherton, as he and the Vicar set off for the Hall, the pictures and curiosities of which the former had expressed a wish to see, ‘you don’t know what I and that boy have been plotting.’

‘No ; what ? I thought you were waiting uncommonly patiently.’

‘Did you ? well, it was because I was making love to your son,’ in a tone of raillery, ashamed to show his real emotion ; ‘if you had such a daughter, I’d have waited Jacob’s seven years for her ! I tell you what it is, Arnold, I am going to take him back to town with me to-morrow.’

‘Indeed ?’ thinking his companion was still joking.

‘Yes, I am, if you and Mrs. Arnold will consent, that is. I want him to see Jones again.’

‘Oh, Hatherton, it is of no use ; Reeves Willis was here only six weeks ago, and the dear fellow’s state only confirmed the truth of his first opinion.’

‘But the boy is sure since then he has made a great step, and I am quite sure I shall not pass a

night in peace till he has seen Jones again—a very rising young man, every one says young Jones is.’

‘But Willis’ experience—’

‘Experience ! very antiquated experience it must be growing by this time. Come, Arnold, you must promise me to let me take the boy back to town with me.’

‘Can he think himself of going ?’ asked the Vicar, remembering how immediately John had decided against taking the much shorter journey to Duthoyte.

‘Yes, and wishes it. I assure you there has been nothing but fair play between us. I have neither depreciated Reeves Willis, nor exalted young Jones, still John wishes to go ; not to stay very long, however, I must own, for here truth got the better of his politeness.’

‘As it always does, happily, when the two clash,’ answered the Vicar ; ‘thank you very much, Hatherton, for offering to take the boy up, and to give him a home whilst in town, it will make the matter much more feasible ; but I must speak to my wife and Johnnie himself, before closing decidedly with your proposal, kind as it is.’

‘Kind ! nonsense,’ responded George Hatherton, longing to tell his old friend the expenses of journey and everything must lie on his shoulders, and how pleasant a burden they would be, too, but too shy to say so.

‘I say, Arnold,’ he said, after some minutes’ silence ; ‘why have you never become a popular author ?’

‘I ?’

‘Come, don’t pretend to be so surprised ; what have you done with *Our Margaret*, and all those pretty things you contributed to the *Baliol Gazette* ?’

‘I think I could put my hand upon most of them. *Our Margaret* I stumbled upon only a year ago.’

‘And why ever haven’t you done something with them ?’

‘Why ?’ asked the Vicar, with a smile, ‘because no one I sent it to discovered in it anything worth publishing.’

‘What ! have you thought of publishing then ?’

‘Yes ; not till last year ; then lighting upon *Our Margaret*, I copied it out fair and sent it to *Blackwood* and *Fraser*, and each returned it with a polite printed refusal.’

‘Hang those printed refusals,’ cried George Hatherton ; ‘I am determined no deluge of MSS. shall drive me into treating the would-be contributors of the *Common Sense* so ; if you must insult a fellow, or young lady, by returning his own delight upon his hands, at least have the civility to say why. If the tale be beneath criticism there is always truth and politeness combined in ‘want of space.’’

‘Then you are overdone with contributors already ?’

‘With would-be ones. I tell you what, Arnold, give me *Our Margaret* ; I’ll put it into the *Common Sense Magazine* next month.’

‘You had better read it again first.’

‘No, I am sure it will do ; you were always the hardest critic of your own performances, so if you

thought it good enough for *Blackwood* or *Fraser* last winter, I am sure it is good enough for the *Common Sense Magazine* this.'

'Ah! but you see *Blackwood* and *Fraser* differed from me in opinion.'

'The more fools they! Come, I will have it. How many pages will it make?—what will you take for it? You see we are but strugglers at present, so can't give its value. Five guineas, eh?'

'Oh! Hatherton,' cried the Vicar, with a choking in his throat, as he thought of his wife and children.

'What—too little? Well then, seven; can't afford to go higher, on my honour; but I'll make room for one such every other month as long as you can supply them, if that makes the bargain fairer.'

'God bless you!'

'Me!' repeated George Hatherton, amazed at his friend's earnestness.

'If you were a father of eight children, trying to live as a gentleman, and bring up his sons as such, on four hundred pounds a year, you would find the prospect of an unexpected thirty pounds a year suddenly dropping into your lap enough to upset you,' answered the Vicar, trying to smile and be calm again.

'How did you ever get flung away here?' cried Mr. Hatherton; 'buried in a little country village!'

'Which has been a most happy home to me and mine. We would not change it for London House. Hatherton, if your *Common Sense Magazine* does no other good, it will make me a contented man again,

that is,' remembering fairness and prudence, 'if upon seeing *Our Margaret* with a fresh eye you think it in any way worthy of the sum you offered.'

'There you are; undervaluing yourself again. Give it me when I go in, and I'll run it through before tea.'

'Ah, and that reminds me that Mary is so very anxious to know whether I think you would read one of your tales aloud after tea.'

'Oh, it would bother Mrs. Arnold so.'

'No, not a bit. Will you? Mary and Miss Storey too, I expect, will be delighted; an author is no every-day being in these parts.'

'I tell you what I'll do, Arnold, read yours and mine too, and see which they like best. If that is not a fair test of their comparative value, what will be?'

'But thinking both yours, they will feel obliged to find something wonderfully good in *Our Margaret*, whether they can find it out or not.'

'No, I think women and children are fairer critics than that, and they haven't a suspicion you ever wrote, have they?' I let it out to Johnnie just now, to his great surprise, but I guess he's too discreet a little fellow to spread it further.'

'Yes, he is; but ah! Annie has seen *Our Margaret*; however, there was a *Christmas Eve* you liked as well, which no one ever saw but yourself,' answered the Vicar, warming into Mr. Hatherton's plan.

'Capital; the only tale I have with me short enough to read is rather Christmassy, so the comparison will be nearer. Capital! give it me when

I come in, that I may look it through and be able to read it as fluently as my own blotty sheets. I dare say, though, yours will be even at first sight by far the more legible of the two.'

By this time the two friends had reached the Hall, and here the pictures, carving, and china diverted the thoughts of both, and on these subjects and the fine arts in general the conversation chiefly ran, till they were at five o'clock once more within Aggesden Vicarage. Then Mr. Arnold found *Last Christmas Eve at Hayes Parsonage, Somersetshire*, and George Hatherton carried it upstairs and settled himself over the fire (which Mary had half an hour ago found out, and relighted), and spent one of the pleasantest hours that had been his this winter, first reading the tale, then dwelling on all the old friends and scenes it brought so vividly before him; not having yet (critical as habit had taught him to be) remembered to *criticise* it when Caroline knocked at his door to tell him tea was ready.

After tea, when most of the party had once more adjourned to the drawing-room, Mr. Hatherton said, with great *sang froid*,

'So, Miss Arnold, your father tells me you would like to hear me read a tale or two of my own with my own mouth; shall we be inconveniencing Mrs. Arnold if we begin now?'

'Oh no,' answered Mrs. Arnold herself at once; 'there is nothing we shall all like better, I am sure.'

'Only Miss Storey, mamma,' said Mary, blushing.

'Ah! yes, Miss Storey,' repeated Mrs. Arnold. 'I

do think, Mr. Hatherton, we must ask you to defer the reading till our little governess is at liberty ; she would be so sorry to miss it.'

'Oh dear, yes ! by all means'—putting the manuscript back into his pocket. 'Well then, let us settle about this boy here. Are you still willing to come with me, sir?'

'Oh yes, thank you,' answered Johnnie, with whom his father and mother had been discussing the idea whilst Mr. Hatherton was engaged upstairs. Very much had it at first startled Mrs. Arnold ; but now she was as eager for its being carried into execution as John himself—far more eager than the Vicar, who had none of John's bright hopes.

'That's right,' said George Hatherton, heartily. 'Well, now then, what train must we go by, and how long may I keep the boy ? Had not we better break the journey by sleeping on the road?'

'No, thank you,' answered the Vicar, thinking how much more kind-hearted and considerate the world was than any one gave it the credit of being ; 'even last August we managed the journey in one day—indeed, the less change of position the better.'

'Well, but may I keep him till I'm tired of him?'

His mother looked at John, and John stretched out his hand towards his mother, smiling bravely, but with full heart and eyes. He wished, oh ! very much, to go ; but, without either father, mother, or Frank, no wonder when the longing was about to be gratified, the poor little fellow's heart (in his present helpless state) sank within him.

‘No, his staying must not depend on your captiousness,’ answered the Vicar, thinking, though he spoke jestingly, how dull the house would be without ‘the little sunbeam’ of old times, ‘the light of his eyes’ of these darker, present days; ‘if Jones wishes to see him more than once, you must please be content to keep him more than a few days; if not, we shall expect our boy home at the earliest opportunity.’

‘Well, if he is very home-sick, I’ll spare him something under a month, but he shan’t be. I’ve a little niece of fifteen in Cambridge-square, who will be charmed to come and sit and play chess with him, and a good-hearted old landlady, who will be a second mother to him, and would break her heart about parting with him at the end of a year.’

Frank, who liked Mr. Hatherton well enough to turn each evening, book in hand, into the drawing-room, instead of staying behind, had folded his arms on *Blue Jackets* long ago, and was listening eagerly, jealously, to every word that passed.

‘Spare the boy a year or a month,’ cried the Vicar; ‘Hatherton, you don’t know what horrors you are proposing!’ and sitting down by the boy’s side, he put his arm round John’s head, and rested his hand on his shoulder; ‘what should we do without this little fellow at our chimney-corner all this dreary winter? No, thank you very much indeed, for being so willing to encumber yourself with him for so long; but indeed we can’t spare him longer than Jones wants him—’

‘And he himself is happy,’ ended Mr. Hatherton, good-humouredly; ‘with that proviso I must be

content, then. Now the next thing is whether it would suit you better if we put off our journey till Friday.'

'No, no, papa,' answered John, in reply to his father's look of enquiry ; he felt already as if his courage must fail were an unexpected whole day and night to intervene between the project and the commencement of its execution.

So this was settled, too ; but somehow the Vicar stayed on by his boy's side that evening, through his wife's singing, Mary's playing, and the reading of the two tales, which began as soon as the piece, which Mary was playing on Bridget's entrance, was over.

'Now here are two,' said Mr. Hatherton, drawing the MSS. once more out of his pocket ; 'one merry, the other sad, which will you have ?'

'Oh, both !' cried John and Mary.

'Well, yes, I meant to read both ; I ought rather to have said which will you have first ?'

'Oh, the sad one, if we must have it at all,' answered Mrs. Arnold, who was old enough to think so much sympathy and sorrow had to be expended on the realities of life that it was a pity to endure needless claims from the events of fiction ; 'then the merry one will cheer us up, and make us forget the woes of the first.'

Mr. Hatherton glanced at the Vicar, but the Vicar was looking at John, cleared his voice, and began *Last Christmas Eve*. But do not fear, neither this tale, nor the great author's own, will be given here ; if it had been, would not nineteen out of every twenty readers have immediately turned

over the leaves reproducing them, to resume the thread proper of this story? Therefore, let the twentieth, who may wish to see this effort of the Vicar's early days, or the more mature imaginings of his old friend George Hatherton, go to their bookseller's and order the February and March numbers of the *Common Sense Magazine* for the year 185—.

Mr. Hatherton looked around him triumphantly as the first tale drew to its close; saw Mrs. Arnold's eager attention, John's wistful face, Mary's brimming eyes, and thoroughly enjoyed the Vicar's blushes. He would not allow *Last Christmas Eve* to be criticised till the second tale had been read, for he saw that, as yet, no one was ready with criticisms; and he was afraid his old friend (whom he knew well enough to feel assured was already rather uneasy at allowing this little *ruse* at all) would betray his secret if he gave him time and opportunity, and so the author hurried on to *The Adventures of Sandy MacGillerty, Esquire*.

The liveliness and fun of Sandy's *début* was rather lost on an audience still almost in tears over the sorrows of the Mrs. Acworth of the preceding tale; but for this, Mr. Hatherton was too good-natured to care. Anna was the first to change tears into smiles, and her ready laugh was infectious. Frank, who had read through all the sentiment of his father's tale, was soon aroused by the wit of its successor, closed *Blue Jackets*, and listened as much amused as any one. Bridget, too, could not help forgetting, in the amusement Sandy occasioned her, to work out the first tale so as to spare Mrs.

Acworth the loss of her son at sea ; forgetting, as young readers do, that if the sorrows of the tale which has so charmed them had been spared them, so must also the pleasurable tears and anxieties they have so lately been lavishing upon its incidents and plot.

Mrs. Arnold, alone, this tale could not carry away with it ; the first had been written so simply, so truthfully, she had felt as if the description of the poor widow lady receiving the news of her sailor son's death was a leaf out of the real book of life. It made her look at her own best-beloved Johnnie, and think how could she ever part with him ?

'Now, then,' as Mr. Hatherton laid down the second MS., 'mid peals of laughter, 'which do you like the best ?

'The first'—'the last,' cried so many voices at once that there was no distinguishing in favour of which tale the voices preponderated.

'What do you say, Mrs. Arnold ?' asked the author of *Sandy*, courteously ; 'criticise quite freely—I promise not to be offended. What does offend me is, when I have read myself hoarse, as at Marshlands the other night, to hear a woman say, 'Well, I think I like the first best ; and yet the second is so very pretty,'—and then have done.'

'What did Hughes himself say ?' asked the Vicar, laughing at Hatherton's admirable mimicry of his niece's sweet, gentle voice, and fear of expressing any opinion of her own.

'Oh ! cut me up right and left ; that's what I like next best to praise. Now, Mrs. Arnold, I am in a hurry to pass my cap round for the half-

pence of criticism, and you must please set a good example.'

'Well, the last tale is very amusing, I dare say, but you will forgive me, I think? I really could not dismiss the first from my mind sufficiently to attend to it as I ought to have done, to compare the two fairly. Surely, your pathos must be ranked higher than your humour'—how George Hatherton longed to clap the Vicar on the back, and congratulate him on the spot—'the parting between the widow and her son, the boy's death, the mother's hearing of the news, is so beautifully written, really—I assure you I would not flatter—but indeed the language is so touching, pure, and straightforward, I can only compare it to that of the Bible—or Shakspeare.'

'Indeed, Mrs. Arnold, you could not have paid the author a higher compliment;' and George Hatherton heartily meant it. 'But that one little touch of humour——'

'Really,' said Mrs. Arnold, looking up with her gracious smile, 'you must exempt me from further criticisms. I admire the tale so much I would much rather not have made one remark upon it, and really cannot begin, to-night at least, to pick it to pieces. I should like to preserve a little longer unspoilt the effect the whole has left behind it.'

'Well then, Master John, what do you say to it?' persisted Mr. Hatherton, with a pertinacity which ran the risk of appearing very bad taste.

But John only looked towards his father. The lad knew his father so well, that the stray sentence Mr. Hatherton had let escape him, as to his friend's having once written tales, was clue enough to make

John quite certain that if his father ever had written such things, this must be one of them.

‘Let us hope Johnnie is speechless with admiration,’ said the author, quickly. ‘Now, Miss Storey, your opinion on their comparative merits, please.’

‘I think I feel like Mrs. Arnold, sir,’ answered the abashed governess; ‘the last piece seemed so like the——.’ She stopped in some confusion at her own boldness.

‘Like what?’

‘St. Paul’s taking ship at Miletus, and leaving Cæsarea,’ said poor Bridget, crimson.

‘Ah! so it does,’ cried Mr. Hatherton, much pleased. ‘What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart?’ Oh! how wonderful those few words are. One seems to hear the sobs of the men, see the tears and weeping of the women, and great, bold, undauntable Paul himself torn in twain like any other man—brought down to a level with one’s own poor humanity,—yet never nobler, even before Agrippa.’

And so criticisms on the tale ceased, and the silence which followed was first broken by the Vicar sending John to bed, in preparation for his long journey on the morrow. It was already nine, so Frank and Mary followed; and then the Vicar said—

‘Annie, even the pleasure your innocent criticisms have given me does not quite reconcile me to the little deceit we have practised. *Last Christmas Eve at Hayes Parsonage, Somersetshire*, is an old tale of my own, none of the great George Hatherton’s.’

‘Really ! well, Frank, do you know, I was on the point of saying I had only once heard any tale to equal it, but forbore, thinking you might not like it. Oh, Frank, how glad I am it is yours ! I almost think now that last sentence surpasses anything even in *Our Margaret*.’



CHAPTER XV.

LONDON.

Know'st thou the time when torturing pain,
 Yielding at last to healing skill,
 Doth yet from feared return constrain
 The sufferer to seclusion still ?
 The lone, still room, the shaded light,
 Excluding all of warm or bright.

Oh, dweller in that lone, still room,
 Thou and thy God are there alone !
 What hast thou 'mid its favouring gloom
 In silent penitence to own ?
 For He, thy true confessor, knows
 Thy need for this enforced repose.

L. N. R.

I TELL you what, Arnold,' said Mr. Hatherton, when the Vicar's little confession was over, 'I think the boy had much better have a companion.'

'Well, if you can take one in, it would be a great comfort both to him and ourselves, I am sure.'

'Then why did not you speak out and say so ?' cried Mr. Hatherton, indignantly. 'I dare say the poor fellow is quite miserable at the thoughts of being left to the tender mercies—'

'But no one can say of you, either bodily or mentally, Hatherton, the tender mercies of the weak, as of the wicked, are but cruel,' interrupted

the Vicar, looking at his friend's strong vigorous limbs.

'No, not quite ; but I don't know that the mercies of the thoughtless are much better, though Taylor has not equally denounced them,' answered Mr. Hatherton, cooling again. 'Well, now, whom will you have ? you yourself, Arnold ; now do !'

'Oh, no ! it really is impossible ; indeed, if I could have seen clearly who could well do so, I believe I should have been bold enough to ask you to take in a second guest.'

'Why not the other boy, Frank ?'

'Why, Frank goes to school on the—yes, to-morrow week—still I think I must commit the great extravagance of sending him up with John for the first few days ; by that time your landlady and yourself will have learnt how little the dear fellow can do, and Johnnie himself will be quite at home with you both,—that is, if Jones should wish to keep him longer.'

'I shall put Jones on his honour to turn John out a perfect cure. There, go and tell the boy his brother is to go with him, do ; I dare say he's fretting about it and doing himself a world of harm now, if the truth were known.'

If John were not exactly 'fretting,' he was low-hearted enough at thinking this would be the last night he and Frank would pass together for months. The Easter holidays were so short the Vicar had settled with Mr. Kelme that Frank should not return to Aggesden till those of Midsummer began. And Frank—as was his wont when inwardly moved

—was more silent, more abrupt, his proud, sullen under lip more defiant than ever, yet waiting on John with such a tender lingering of attendance that John well knew what his rough short words meant,—nothing but love.

‘The last night ; Frank, give me a kiss,’ said the younger boy, when safe in bed at last.

Frank gave it, then knelt down by his brother and buried his face in the coverlid.

‘Oh, dear Frank, don’t,’ cried John ; ‘I do think Mr. Jones will think as much better of me than Mr. Willis, as he did in the summer ; I feel quite sure he will. Frank, if I shouldn’t be back before you go to Hereford, do promise me you will forget me quite, at least, all about this part of me—and be quite happy !’

‘How can I ?’

‘Oh, you must be ; it is so jolly to have lots of companions, always enough for cricket or anything, and even lessons seem almost fun when you have so many working just as hard around you.’

It was just then Mr. Arnold knocked ; Frank started up, erect and tearless in a moment.

‘What, not in bed, Frank ? that’s rather fortunate, as it happens. Mr. Hatherton has been asking whether Johnnie would not like you to go to town with him to-morrow.’

Frank’s pale, heavy face brightened as when a stray sunbeam flashes across a dreary moor ; but it was John who cried joyfully, ‘Oh, has he ? oh, Frank, how delightful !’

‘Can you pack up on such short notice, Frank ?’

‘Oh, yes ! I’ve nearly done John’s things.’

‘That’s right. But look here, Frank. It is a very extravagant pleasure I am giving myself in letting John have the comfort of having you with him till you go to Market Rayston—so you mustn’t mind going up third-class.’

John looked at Frank, who shared some of Mary’s class prejudices and feelings, and would not take such travelling as good fun as John himself could have done; but Frank answered, ‘Very well, sir,’ without any visible hesitation.

‘Can I help you? shall I send mamma?’ asked the Vicar.

‘No, thank you,’ answered Frank, ‘I think I can manage.’

It was thanks to Mary that socks and shirts for a week’s visit could ‘so easily be laid hands upon; but of this Frank never thought.

‘Please thank Mr. Hatherton,’ cried John, as the Vicar disappeared.

And so the next day, by the twelve o’clock train, the author and his two young friends were off.

‘Get out at Worcester, Frank, and see if John’s comfortable,’ was the Vicar’s last cry, as the train moved off; ‘you’ll have seven minutes there.’ And then once more he stood and watched the London train out of sight, but with no such sigh as that of last August.

At Worcester, Mr. Hatherton remembered what in the hurry and bustle of the whole project had hitherto been forgotten,—that his landlady had no idea her lodger was bringing an invalid guest and a boy of fourteen home with him, and so he dismounted, telegraphed to town, and then sprang into the car-

riage again, just as Frank was springing out, having seen that John was happy and comfortable.

The next day, at three, Mr. Jones came. What a moment for the two brothers! John lay quite pale awaiting him; Frank sat by him, bearing a part of his punishment hitherto spared him, for he had been out with Harry when Mr. Willis had so unexpectedly driven up to the Vicarage six weeks ago. At last Mr. Jones came, brisk, professional, chatted a few minutes to Mr. Hatherton on the weather to give his patient time to recover himself, and then proceeded to business.

Not a word would he say, one way or the other, in the two boys' presence, till John was on the sofa again and looked so wistfully into his face that he could not be so uncommunicative as he had intended to be till alone with Mr. Hatherton.

'Just as I thought,' he said, calmly; 'injury nothing to what Willis supposes. Why you've nearly outgrown it already, my boy. I'll look in again to-morrow, and we must try a little walking;' and the two boys were left alone.

It was then Frank did give way, kissed John for the first time, unasked, and ten minutes later, was whistling 'Cheer! boys, cheer!' over his letter home, all the more happily that he was quite unconscious he was whistling at all.

With Mr. Hatherton, Mr. Jones spoke more freely.

'You know,' he said, 'the sprain is not yet well of course not; but there are other things to be looked after besides that. The boy had better be a little maimed all his life than be a helpless log for

ever. He'll lose the use of his limbs as sure as I'm alive, if Willis' system is persisted in.'

'You don't think he will be even lame?'

'Well, no, I hope not; it shan't be my fault if he is; that's all I can say.'

'And you must be pretty well aware the success of your system must be your chief reward,' said George Hatherton; 'the father is but a poor country Vicar!'

'Ah!' with a pang at the fee already received. 'Oh, then, of course I'll attend him for nothing. What a shame it is so many of our English clergy are so ill paid!'

'Don't attend him for nothing, make some nominal charge, or Mr. Arnold, the best, the cleverest fellow alive, will never forgive my having hinted his circumstances. Poverty does not drive out pride.'

'No, I should think not; I was proud enough five years ago; but can afford now to be as humble as a saint. I'll come again to-morrow—same time. Good-bye.'

The next day, poor fellow! brought the sterner side of the picture before Frank. John had looked forward with delight to being once more allowed to put foot to the ground again; the boy had little pictured the pain and faintness that the realization of his longing would cost him. He cried for mercy after the first three steps, but Mr. Jones would have him cross the room, and Frank stood bolt upright, his face so deadly pale, his brown eyes so glaring, his under-lip so resolute, yet so defiant, he looked more like a tiger ready to spring upon his

prey than a boy of fourteen. John felt one other word of his would have scattered all Frank's common sense and forbearance to the winds; that what Frank was longing to do was to knock Mr. Jones and his heartless commonplaces to the earth together. And so John almost bit his lip through with pain rather than let a second cry of weakness escape him.

And this scene Frank had to bear every day, till the Thursday came on which he must return home to start for school on the morrow; rather *chose* to bear it, for John entreated him not to endure such needless pain. And so no wonder, though by this time John could cross the room with comparative comfort, and it was only Mr. Jones' insisting every day that he should do more than on the last, which caused the boy weariness and misery,—so no wonder when Frank returned, Mr. Arnold thought this visit to London seemed to have undone almost all the good of that to Duthoyte.

Poor John, too, had had a great disappointment. The copying he had begun with such pleasure the very morning after his arrival, Mr. Jones had put an end to so roughly as soon as he heard of it, had lectured the boy so harshly and sharply on thus (as he declared) flinging away the chances of recovery,—that John, weakened by the bodily pain the surgeon had only just left off inflicting and quite unused to any such tone or words, had, to his everlasting after shame and sorrow, burst into tears; which tears Mr. Jones only regarded as so many fresh sins, whilst the two together so maddened Frank that the boy stepped forward and said, imperiously,

‘If you are such a brute, sir, I think you had better leave the room;’ whereupon Mr. Jones laughed, and avenged the insult by turning Frank himself out. Then sitting down by his scared little patient, said he had had no intention of hurting his feelings, had only wished to impress upon him more effectually, that writing caused him to assume a position he could not yet use prudently for more than a few minutes together.

This was a sad trial to poor John, who had pictured at least earning the wherewithal to pay for his journeys before he returned, and had thus consoled himself for the length of time that Mr. Jones seemed meaning to keep him under his immediate eye.

Perhaps on the whole John was almost glad when Thursday came, and Frank must go ; it was so very difficult to bear up hour after hour before him.

When Frank was gone, Mr. Hatherton took a good deal more notice of the little fellow, and, seeing how he longed to be of use and how the prohibition respecting the copying had saddened and tried him, used to bring some of his literary work into the room where John lay, and each morning toss over the manuscripts the post brought him for John to look at and sift, telling him to put aside those he liked best, and to mark any passages that struck him as particularly bad or good. Perhaps ‘the would-be contributors’ would not quite have approved of their manuscripts being thus primarily submitted to the judgment of a boy of fourteen ; but Mr. Hatherton soon found out how far his own

and John's judgments coincided, and I am sure not one, if they had known what a comfort this occupation afforded to the little homesick, sorely-tried lad, would have wished the editor of the *Common Sense Magazine* to have acted otherwise for a moment.

Then in the afternoon, when Mr. Hatherton was out, sometimes his sister, Mrs. Pole, the wife of a London incumbent, far more often her daughter Clara, would come and sit an hour or two by John's side and read to him, chat, or play chess with him, as the boy liked best ; that was a very happy part of John's day, for by this time Mr. Jones' visit was always over. Then Mr. Hatherton came in to his six o'clock dinner, and played a game at cribbage or picquet with him afterwards ; sometimes brought back stray friends with him ; sometimes did not come home to dinner at all ; but then, Mrs. Wilson, the landlady, always brought up the lad's tea herself, and sat and talked to him in her kind-hearted motherly way, asking about his home, and his mother and sisters, telling in return all about her own dispersed family, till the good woman herself longed to see Mabel Arnold, and John little less the great merchant captain and man, six feet six 'without his shoes,' of whom Mrs. Wilson spoke with such unbounded admiration and respect.

Twice a week, too, John had German lessons from a refugee, who owed Mr. Hatherton ever so many pounds ; but to do him justice, was glad to wipe off part of his debt by giving his lessons at the generous rate of seven-and-sixpence per hour. Then, too, Lord and Lady Duthoyte came to town, and, the very morning

after their arrival, both came to Suffolk-street, and the sight of Antoinette's sweet, kind face, was a pleasure which only that of looking again upon his mother's could have surpassed.

Sir Hector's arrival in England, the middle of February, took the Duthoytes away again, both for a time—Antoinette for some weeks ; but by this time John could almost afford to spare them. Not only had Mr. Jones' visits almost ceased to be painful, but the boy was beginning to reap the fruits of his patience and sufferings ; he was wheeled out into the busy London streets half-an-hour each day, and oh ! what a glorious sight shops, and fellow-men, and boys, was to one so long debarred from intercourse with the outer world. Next he was allowed to sit up in an easy chair half-an-hour each evening, and now that the surgeon saw his bold measures had answered, Mr. Jones could afford to be gentle to the lad he had so tortured, and called him 'a brave little fellow' half a dozen times for making, at his bidding, some advance which did not require one tithe of the courage many lesser advances, for which he had received no encouraging approbation at all, had cost him a month back.

So spring was coming on, and the Vicarage was still without either of its boys. Miss Storey and her four pupils were working very steadily and uninterruptedly in the schoolroom. Great had been Mary's consternation and Anna's sorrow when told that at Midsummer Bridget was to leave them ; but both showed their grief in the most satisfactory way, that of increased diligence ; indeed, Bridget often thought if Midsummer were not to put an end

to this pleasant governess-ship, she could not have allowed Mary so to task herself.

April came, and with it appeared in the *Common Sense Magazine*, *Our Margaret*, headed 'by the author of *Last Christmas Eve*,' and Mr. Hatherton's conclusion that this tale and its heading caused a perceptible increase in the monthly circulation of the periodical was quite correct, though one that the Vicar was far too humble-minded to be persuaded into believing. Quite treat enough, *Our Margaret* gave him—far more than compensation for all the disappointment and bitterness it had once caused its author—in enabling him with a clear conscience to run up to town and pass a week with his boy. Oh ! how father and son enjoyed that week. How the sight of Frank Arnold and his lad made the author long to be a father himself ; feel he would have flung all literary honours, past, present, or future, to the winds, could he thereby have secured such a lad, and the love of such a lad, as John Hector Arnold, in a son of his own.

The *love* he had already, and well had the popular author earned it. Ah ! George Hatherton, popularity and a successful career may not bring wife or children at your bidding ; but whilst they give you means thus to be a blessing to those with whom Heaven has seen fit to deal less bountifully, whose pathway it has seen fit to strew with thorns and obscurity in the place of roses and the sweet breath of praise,—whilst they have as yet been impotent to make you callous or indifferent to the wants of those around ; nay, have rather fanned your Love and Charity daily brighter and brighter—despise them not.

‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’

‘Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.’

‘I was a stranger and ye took me in: * * I was sick and ye visited me. * * Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.’



CHAPTER XVI.

MARKET RAYSTON.

It seems hard that Vasco Nuñez should be condemned for an offence of which he was, comparatively speaking, innocent. But this is the way in which, both in small and great matters, we are all punished, namely, for those things which we did not commit ; and this is quite reasonable, considering how many of our worst actions do not find their fitting retribution just yet.

HELPS' *Spanish Conquest in America.*

MEANWHILE, Frank was ceasing to be a freshman at Market Rayston Grammar School. His was not a nature to win him speedy favour either with masters or boys, but soon both granted him a grudging admiration. The masters could not but give him credit for fair abilities, and far more than ordinary perseverance and industry, so that in his sure, dogged way, Frank Arnold was leaving many a cleverer boy far behind him. His companions soon learnt that he had a spirit nothing could daunt, and a temper with which it was far from safe to trifle.

‘ Well, Frank, good-bye and God bless you,’ had been among the Vicar’s last words to him ; ‘ remember always that you are a Christian, and there’s no need to add then, remember you are a gentleman. You will find very mixed companions, I fear ; but so you must whether launched into the

world at fourteen or twenty. Conquer the temptations of evil company now, and your pathway through life will be half made already. One thing, Frank, don't be ashamed of your religion ; promise me night and morning to pray for help and protection—and if your prayer be not half-a-dozen words, let it be said upon your knees.'

Frank had promised, and he kept his promise. He was disturbed, laughed, and jeered at, but as not one of such assaults made the object falter in his purpose, they soon ceased to be amusing even to their perpetrators. Besides, there was a flash in Frank's eye and a shooting of his lip when he rose from his knees,—don't think one half-year could so change the boy as to make him bear such assaults with John's cheerful, brave simplicity,—before which the boy's cowardly or bullying assailants soon learnt it was safer to desist.

The two brothers had agreed to write once a week. Frank heard on Sunday morning, and wrote again on Sunday evening, posting his letters the next day. Very different the two boys' letters were, although Frank knowing no eye but John's ever saw his side of the correspondence, was learning to write more freely and openly than he would even yet have dreamed of speaking. Here is one of these weekly letters dated in the middle of March :—

'DEAR JOHN,—I am very glad you seem getting on at last ; besure and tell me whether the first going out tires you. Thank you for sending me the C.S.M. ; the nice fellow, Williams, who I told you of' (oh, Lindley

Murray !) ‘last week, laughed so over Sandy Mac Cleverty I thought it would have killed him. We are working hard now for the Easter Examination ; how I wish you were here with me. Oh, dear, dear John, if I could but bear all the pain you are bearing in your place ; but it’s no good saying so, when I can’t do it. I was thrashed the other day by Barnes, the under-master—for telling the truth, so I didn’t mind, though I don’t believe he’d a right to touch me ; but when I thought of all I had cost you I was quite glad, and as he didn’t choose to believe my simple word, wouldn’t answer him again ; how dear little Barnes has hated me since. Kelme we all like, at least all but the low set, and a precious low set some of them are. Send me on any letters from home, and burn this.

‘Your affectionate brother,

‘FRANCIS MERIVALE ARNOLD.’

To which letter the next Sunday brought the following answer—

Tuesday Morning.

‘DEAR, DEAR FRANK,—I was so glad to have your letter, and I like it all but—you know what. Mr. Hatherton is out this morning, so I thought I would begin a letter at once ; and as Mr. Jones says I may write now ten minutes together, shall get quite a long letter done before next Saturday. I heard from mamma to-day, and send on her letter. —*Wednesday.* I was stopped here by my German lesson, and then Cousin Netta and Sophy came in and sat and talked till dusk ; Sophy looks so nice and pleasant, but is only at Carlton Terrace till

Saturday, when she goes back to Sir Hector and Robert and all the others at Elton Merivale. She is going to come again this afternoon to show me the sketches she made in Germany, and is going to come every day from twelve to one to give me a lesson in water-colours ; and after she goes Netta says she will come when she can in her place. Mr. Jones says it can't hurt me to lie still and watch them, or even for a quarter of an hour or so each afternoon do a little by myself on *your* table. I hear their knock now, so must leave off for to-day, I dare say, for Mr. Hatherton is going to have some friends in the evening, and Clara Pole is coming to read in the afternoon. Every one is so kind, but there is no one like you, Frank ; it makes me long for Midsummer to think of you.

—*Thursday*. Oh, you can't think how lovely Sophy's drawings are. I could not help trying to copy the bit she did before me yesterday afternoon, nearly half-an-hour after she was gone, and was quite afraid of telling Mr. Jones so this morning ; but he took it very kindly, he is much kinder than he used to be. I do believe at first he was half afraid of what he was about himself, but sees his way to a cure clearly now.—*Friday*. What do you think ? last night there came a large parcel directed to me, and it was Sophy's lovely sketch of Heidelberg, framed and all, and such a kind little note inside ; it hangs up now opposite me, and must go in the drawing-room when we go back. She is so pleasant and patient about my horrid attempts at copying the piece she does every day before me. Mr. Hatherton says he never saw

amateur drawings to equal hers. Do you know Harry has passed his examination at Portsmouth? I forgot to tell you last week, and is appointed to the *Cleopatra*, 6 guns, and sails for the Mediterranean on the 20th, or thereabouts. Lady Duthoyte—I don't know what to call her now she is such a grand married woman—expects him to come up on his way from Elton Merivale on Monday to spend a day with her, and has promised to bring him here to say good-bye.—*Saturday*. I see I have never told you how I enjoy going out every day; I do like seeing such lots of people and all the shops. The first day I was a little tired; the air seemed to make one so funny; but now that's all right, and it's one of the pleasantest half-hours of the day. Good-bye, dear Frank; ever with very best love,

‘Your affectionate brother,

‘JOHN HECTOR ARNOLD.’

Before this letter reached Frank, something John would have liked far less than his brother's silent defiance of pompous Mr. Barnes had occurred. The details may be quickly hurried over. A supper-party, contrary to all rules, had been given in Frank's room; in this Frank had steadily refused to take any part, until he had found a little fellow of ten sent out on the dangerous adventure of procuring a pack of cards. Then, finding all interference useless, and the sender too big to be challenged, he had quietly run the risk himself—run it successfully, flung down the cards scornfully, and walked away.

But never was a truer saying than ‘Murder will

out.' There is no need to follow the slight clues which led Mr. Barnes to discover before afternoon school the next day that a supper-party had been given, and also to suspect that some boy had broken bounds and bought forbidden goods at one and the same time. So, after school, Mr. Kelme detained the boys, addressed them, exhorting the guilty ones to step forward, and thus save the whole house from the punishment he should otherwise inflict on it. This required some moral courage on the part of his hearers, for Mr. Kelme was not a man to be trifled with ; his piercing eye, sarcastic tongue, and heavy hand, won him more fear than love from many of his scholars, whom a little more considerate treatment might have turned into upright, honourable fellows yet. Nevertheless, he was a most conscientious, hard-working man, and in reality, kind-hearted enough.

Now, no one spoke ; no one stepped forward. There was a dead silence ; the lesser boys looked at one another, as did some of the guilty. Williams hesitated ; but Barton drew him back.

'Very well,' said the head master, coolly. 'I have given you the chance of forgetting yourselves for a few minutes, and being gentlemen, you decline the opportunity. Therefore, of course, it is perfectly useless to ask which of you it was who not only took part in the supper, but sent out for cards after Mr. Barnes' hours. Therefore I sentence the whole house—'

'Sir,' said Frank Arnold, white as death, but firm as a rock, stepping forward, 'I fetched the cards.'

‘What, didn’t send a junior, and let him run the risks?’ asked Mr. Kelme, incredulously.

‘I went,’ repeated Frank.

‘But didn’t join the party or use them,’ whispered poor Williams to Barton. ‘I must speak.’

‘You fool! what good?—the school saved, it won’t save your friend Arnold,’ answered Barton, without turning towards the speaker, and scarcely moving his lips, so in no wise betraying himself.

‘Then you may step up here, Arnold. But first, all you guilty boys, mind, I could, if I had chosen, have had every name concerned, every event detailed before I came into the school. Don’t be afraid, gentlemen; if only one of you can face a thrashing to save the whole school, you are beneath being thrashed at all. I did not choose to avail myself of the underhand information offered; but I tell you what I do now, pity and despise every one of you, and only wish I could hope your own consciences will not spare you as I myself am doing.’

Frank bore the severe punishment awaiting him, ‘bravely and in silence,’ even accepted Williams’ after unavailing sorrow very equably; the perverse fellow on the whole was rather glad that Mr. Kelme had treated him unjustly. If he had been as guilty as the head master supposed him, Frank Arnold’s bearing would have been very different from what it now was; in such case, if appealed to, he would have stepped forward equally unhesitatingly to incur his fair share of the penalty; but such penalty, *being fair*, would have shamed and crushed him; now, it in no wise so affected him. He was sorry Mr. Kelme

was disappointed in him, and thought so badly of him ; but, as this ill opinion was due to others' failing, not his own, Frank bore it very bravely, did his work as well as ever, went whistling about as usual, would not let his eye fall before his master's ; in fact, made Mr. Kelme say on the Friday evening to his fair, plump little wife :—

‘What a plucky fellow that young Arnold is!—excessively impudent ; but really, such impudence as his is rather refreshing, and he behaved like a Briton yesterday. I wish he'd only disobeyed little Barnes’—(unfortunately his second master was one of Mr. Kelme's especial aversions) ; ‘and we could have him in to tea to-morrow, and show the school the worth of his example.’

And actually, the next morning Mr. Kelme did ask Frank Arnold in to tea, and with a clear conscience, for Williams, gentle-spirited as he was, could bear his burden no longer. He made a full confession of his own disobedience, and full exoneration of Arnold in all other respects than the one trespass which Frank himself had allowed to be considered to include all, and the next morning rose a free and happy boy again.

So, after the morning's lessons, Mr. Kelme kept Arnold, and greatly pleased and amused was the master now at the remembrance of the boy's bold, undaunted mien throughout the two last days. He was not quite the man to see that the code of honour upon which Frank had been acting was as unfair upon his master as upon himself. He was only too rejoiced to find at last a spirit that responded to his own.

‘So, Arnold,’ he said, with a half smile and bright eye, ‘you were not so bad as you seemed after all ; you might as well have spoken out, and let me treat you more mercifully ; but really I am almost glad you let me see instead what a brave fellow you could be. Come in to tea to-night, will you, at a quarter to seven ?’

Frank did not know whether he liked this invitation ; but he certainly uncommonly liked Mr. Kelme’s praise, and felt the blood rush into his cheeks with gratification. Of course the invitation was a royal command, and could not be refused ; but then it was almost an equal honour. And a very pleasant evening Frank had ; brave, fearless, and cold as he could be, he had lived at home long enough to find school-life very rough and unfeeling, at times really repugnant. The well-carpeted, well-curtained, well-lighted room was a pleasure in itself ; but, beyond compare, was the charm of Mrs. Kelme’s soft voice, merry smile, and pretty, easy gestures. Mr. Kelme, too, was no longer head master, but a good-humouredly sarcastical husband and host, cutting jokes at his wife’s expense and that of a young lady guest, which the first little woman, at any rate, repaid with interest ; and playing with his little sixteen-months-old girl as fondly as Frank’s own father could have done. Of great use was little Miss Janet in thawing the first rather appalling atmosphere. As soon as she was gone came tea ; and then Mrs. Kelme sang, and Miss Alston was set to play at bagatelle with Frank, while Mr. Kelme was speedily forgotten behind his paper.

By the time nine came and Frank must take his leave, the boy was almost sorry to go, and the young wife and mother knew more of her young guest's home and *his* mother than Mrs. William Arnold had learnt in a three weeks' visit. After that evening Mrs. Kelme always smiled and spoke when she met Frank Arnold, and Frank touched his cap to herself and her friend as a young gentleman should do.



CHAPTER XVII.

‘ A SPIRIT BRIGHT.’

Is she not passing fair ?

Tempest.

ONCE more to travel to Suffolk-street and the Vicar and his son. Mr. Hatherton was going into Yorkshire to pay an annual visit to an old aunt the week after his old friend's visit, and pressed Mr. Arnold to spend this week also with John in town, but Mr. Arnold within one year had had more holidays than had been his for five years previously, and would not stay. He had hoped to take back John with him, but though not absolutely forbidding such removal, Mr. Jones much wished to keep his patient within reach one month longer, and so when Mrs. William Arnold offered her home to the boy, the Vicar gladly and thankfully accepted her offer, almost indeed offending Mr. Hatherton by doing so, till Mr. Jones said the comparatively country air of Clapham would be a great advantage to the lad.

Lord Duthoyte, who was by when part of the plan was being settled, immediately offered the use of their carriage, and it was in this coroneted vehicle and by cockaded servants that the Vicar and his son were driven to Arundel Villa, in which, and the surrounding Lodges and Villas, this equipage created great delight and interest.

‘I wish I could have gone with you yesterday,’ said Antoinette to the Vicar when he called the next morning to bid good-bye in Carlton Terrace, after having just bidden farewell to his son at Clapham; ‘it is so fine a day I must drive down in the afternoon and see how Johnnie has borne the journey and change. He will be glad to see an old friend’s face after losing you. Mrs. William Arnold will not think it a liberty?’

‘Oh no; she is a very kind-hearted woman; indeed the whole world’s heart seems to open in one’s trouble; how many friends John’s accident has given us,’ added the Vicar, gratefully.

‘And how well the dear boy seems, so bright and cheerful; my husband is so fond of him; ah! Mr. Arnold, before I next see you—’ And the young Countess was still young enough to hold up her face for a kiss, and her old friend fond enough to give it heartily.

And so only four-and-twenty hours after its first appearance in the Arundel-road, Lady Duthoyte’s carriage drove up again, and her ladyship sent in her card to Mrs. William Arnold, bearing the scrutiny of many eyes as she sat in her simple black dress and bonnet leaning back in the luxurious barouche. Mrs. William Arnold was at home, and Antoinette was ushered into a drawing-room which the bright spring sun made so warm and cheerful that the fire in the grate seemed almost superfluous.

‘We are such old friends of Mr. Francis Arnold’s,’ said her ladyship, simply, bowing, and holding out her hand to her pleased but hurried hostess, ‘that

I am sure you will excuse the liberty I have taken in thus calling. I was so anxious to know how Johnnie is ; quite well, you dear boy ?

‘Quite,’ answered Johnnie, brightly, looking so much pleased to see Antoinette that she was very glad that she had not let her husband dissuade her from the exertion ; ‘isn’t it delightful to see green trees again ? do just look, Netta, at that almond tree, one mass of pink. Aunt Ann has put me where I can lie and look at it all day.’

‘Doesn’t he look a different boy to what he was a few months ago ?’ asked Lady Duthoyte of Mrs. Arnold ; ‘and no wonder he so enjoys this change ; how pretty and rural this part of Clapham still is !’

‘Yes, but new houses, very second-rate ones, are springing up all around ; the neighbourhood is sadly changed since we came.’

‘Ah ! indeed ; but that is the case everywhere ; still how one grudges field after field being spoilt and built over ;’ but here the maid ushered in Mrs. Hopkins.

‘Mrs. Hopkins, Lady Duthoyte ; my Lady, Mrs. Hopkins,’ said poor Mrs. Arnold, in perplexity.

Lady Duthoyte rose and bowed, and then drawing her chair nearer John’s chatted with him the next half hour, till finding Mrs. Hopkins did not rise to go she rose herself, shaking hands lingeringly with Johnnie, and simply and kindly with the lady of the house.

‘Excuse me,’ cried Mrs. Hopkins, as she was passing this lady with a bow, ‘but surely the Miss Merivale we had the pleasure of meeting at Ratisbon was——’

‘My sister?’ asked Antoinette herself, seeing the good old lady was puzzled how to finish her question politely; ‘indeed she was, and many a pleasant hour she owed there to your kindness.’

Be it remembered, with all her kindness and graciousness, no one could condescend so affably as Lady Agnes’ eldest daughter.

‘Miss Merivale and Sir Hector are quite well, I hope?’

‘Quite well, thank you; my sister was with me a few weeks ago; Sir Hector is at present in Hampshire. May I remember you to them?’

‘If your ladyship will be so kind—and poor Sir Hector?’

‘My father is tolerably well, thank you. I fear I must not linger; I shall be scolded, if out too late, by my husband, who, I think, has the pleasure of sometimes meeting yours, Mrs. Hopkins. Good-bye;’ and Antoinette departed, thinking how superior were the Frank Arnolds in their poverty to their cousins in their wealth, and a good deal pleased at having been so very affable and gracious to such a queer, overdressed woman as Mrs. Hopkins. Antoinette was still a little too supercilious for her simpler-minded husband.

‘What a charming woman,’ cried Mrs. Hopkins, as the carriage drove off; ‘far more of the aristocrat about her than little Miss Sophy. We used to wonder at Ratisbon how such a fine, handsome man as Sir Hector could have such a plain daughter as Miss Sophy, but perhaps she was like the mother?’

‘Was she, Johnnie?’ asked Mrs. Arnold, who was

much pleased that Mrs. Hopkins should have seen how highly the Arnolds were connected, and how friendly the great branches were with the lesser twigs.

‘Oh, no ; Lady Agnes was short, but then she was thin, and had not Sophy’s good-humour and niceness.’

‘Ah ! and yet Sir Hector seemed inconsolable for her loss?’ remarked Mrs. Hopkins, curiously ; but John would not be drawn into any further revelations.



CHAPTER XVIII.

MARSHLANDS.

If ladies be but young and fair,
They have the wit to know it.

MEANWHILE Mary and Anna had been paying a visit at Marshlands Rectory. The one night's visit was the beginning of an acquaintance which, now the Lees were settled at Marshlands, very soon became a fast friendship between the two younger girls. Mary and Charlotte liked each other very well, and Mary was pleased and flattered by pretty, accomplished Charlotte Lee taking such pains to win her, making such decided advances to her comparatively passive self. Mary led too busy a life at home, and was too fond of quiet home pursuits, ever to be eager to make a friend out of the house ; but when a friend thrust herself upon her—took the trouble to pursue her, she found friendship had pleasures of which she had never dreamt.

Mr. Arnold, when he came home, laughed at Anna's violent attachment to Lucy Lee, which had ripened so quickly on Anna's part in his one week's absence, that Mr. Hughes often rallied his young sister-in-law on the endless books, notes, and messages passing between Marshlands and Aggesden ; but neither Anna nor Lucy were to be laughed out of their honest, if sudden affection, and in their

hearts both gentlemen were pleased with it, when they really thought about it. Mr. Hughes thought Lucy lacked strength and energy, good, pleasant girl as she was ; the Vicar, that such familiar intercourse with so refined and well-bred a girl must soften and civilize Anna. And certainly from this time Anna began to pay much more attention to clean collars and ribbons. The friendship sped on merrily through the long sunny days of April. On the 30th, Charlotte and Lucy collected a party of sixteen neighbours, which with their four selves made a very pleasant number for quadrilles, lancers, and country-dances ; nay, as they were all mere boys and girls, Mr. Hughes did not object to waltzing, and Charlotte's graceful celerity equalled, if not surpassed that of Antoinette Merivale, of whom in many ways this young lady reminded all the Arnolds save the Vicar, who stoutly maintained that what was natural vivacity and *hauteur* in Miss Merivale was affectation and 'air' in Charlotte Lee. At least this was the remark he made to his wife, being of course more cautious towards his children. 'She'll do Mary no harm, though,' he ended, good-naturedly, feeling he had spoken unkindly ; but in truth, the airs he had objected to were those the young lady had shown to her clever brother-in-law, a man more than double her own age. 'She is a pretty, well-mannered girl on the whole, and her faults are not those that Mary will be tempted to imitate.'

Just at this time Mary was asked to spend two or three days at Marshlands by herself ; the Lees' governess was to arrive on May 6th, and Charlotte

was very anxious to have a few days with Mary before her arrival, and as Mary had not been very well lately, her father and mother pressed her to go, even at the cost of two whole days of Miss Storey's instruction. So Mary went, but before she came back her friendship was much cooled, in fact two days of such close, unceasing intercourse had in many ways tried and disenchanted Mary Arnold. Charlotte was patronizing on the strength of being one month older, far more highly accomplished than her guest, and the daughter of a gentleman who would as soon have paid five hundred a-year as two hundred, as he had been doing for his two daughters' education, and patronage was the last thing that Mary Arnold could stand. Then if Charlotte was patronizing, poor Mary was also, by the end of the second day, jealous. Why should this girl play, draw, dance, talk French, so much better than herself? simply because Charlotte's father was rich, her own poor. Charlotte had had every advantage from her childhood, Mary very few till the last year and a-half, and yet in two months she would lose Miss Storey, whereas Charlotte was lamenting that her education was to go on for two years longer, at least.

'Wont I, if I can, get papa to write for me to India before then?' she said more than once, when abusing Miss Wardale in anticipation. 'I don't see why I should wait till Lucy's old enough to go out too; I am sure I can never live two years longer in this poky, out-of-the way place.'

'The garden's very pleasant,' said Lucy, 'and then dear little—'

‘Oh, I hate babies! and I hate John. I do,’ seeing Mary looked shocked; ‘now, before Emmie married, I used to get papa to do just as I liked; but now he’s taken it into his head to think so much of John Hughes, there’s no getting anything done at all. I wrote to papa to beg him to let us stay on at Mrs. Lavender’s; no, John thought ‘the education superficial, and the tone of the school worldly!’ Mere cant.—Does he want to turn us into great country bumpkins, like that fat little Miss Coles he makes so much of in the Sunday School?’

John Hughes himself was at present enduring Miss Lee’s hostilities very quietly; for, as before said, he felt a girl of her nature might well feel vexed and irritated at the step he had taken in writing such a letter on Mrs. Lavender’s establishment to his father-in-law, that the good old gentleman had taken it so to heart he had immediately jumped at the country Rector’s offer of finding room at Marshlands for his two sisters-in-law and a first-rate governess, if the Colonel thought he would prefer such a change of system to that of a mere change of school. Charlotte never gave her brother-in-law credit for having pondered nearly a year over the increasing self-complacency and affectation of her own manners, before feeling justified in transmitting his own opinion of the system of education pursued at Porchester Terrace to his unknown father-in-law; particularly as no one could deny how highly accomplished the girls had already become beneath it. But when Mr. Hughes did feel sure it was his duty to interfere, he wrote in a tone

which brought the old man—working for his children's aggrandizement, longing vainly for a daughter's smile to cheer and make a home for him in a strange land, — to immediate decision ; that at Christmas the two girls should leave Mrs. Lavender. 'Make Christian gentlewomen of them,' wrote the old soldier; 'that is all I want. God bless them !'

Until Emily Lee had been introduced into London society, the three sisters had shared a governess at the aunt's with whom they had hitherto lived ; this aunt had died three years ago, and her sister, who had not taken charge of the three motherless and, to all intents, fatherless girls, had no room in her smaller home for schoolroom and governess, and had sent Charlotte and Lucy to a fashionable and, in one sense, first-rate school, and here the two girls had been very happy till the idea of leaving it had arisen now that Miss Lee had resigned the charge of them to their married sister, and Charlotte's flippancy and self-conceit during her previous summer visit to Marshlands alarmed and disgusted honest, simple John Hughes. Substantives and verbs are both here too strong, but give a true idea, more or less, of the impression Charlotte Lee, in spite of her prettiness, grace, and liveliness, left behind her on her brother-in-law's mind.

'Who is well up in foreign history?' asked Mr. Hughes, the last morning of Mary's stay, looking up from the *Times*. 'Charlotte, who was the *fourth* wife of Philip the Second?'

'Fourth? I'm sure I thought he'd only one—old Queen Mary,' answered Charlotte, listlessly.

‘Well, I suppose Don Carlos, at least, had a mother ;’ to which irony, Charlotte, had she been as well skilled in royal pedigree as in other matters ; might have retorted ‘and, I suppose, Philip the Third had one also ;’ but really I don’t think she knew such a being had ever existed. So, unmolested, Mr. Hughes continued, ‘Come, Emmie, can’t you help me ?’

‘No, I am afraid not, John ; let me think, first he married—why, who—who *was* Don Carlos’ mother ?’

‘Well, Mary of Portugal ; and then our Mary, and then that pretty wasted Princess of Valois, but who then I can’t imagine.’

‘Anne of Austria,’ had trembled on Mary’s lips all this time ; but she would no more make a parade of her knowledge than of her aristocratic connexions ; not that it was exactly humility which restrained her.

‘Some German, I can’t help thinking—Miss Arnold, can you help us ?’

‘I think it was Anne of Austria, daughter of Maximilian,’ answered Mary ; quiet and blushing, but pleased at heart both that the question had been asked her, and that as it had been asked she had *not* been bold enough to volunteer the information.

‘Well, and now can you tell us what kind of a woman she was, pretty or ugly, old or young ? I can’t make out the force of this allusion yet.’

‘Oh, much younger than Philip, and she died before him. I think, sir,—that is, I remember she was rather good-looking.’

By this time Mary was genuinely bashful, and Mr. Hughes' 'Thank you ; a memory like yours is worth having,' made her, at the time, blush deeply and feel almost ashamed of her own knowledge. But when these feelings were over, Mary, as was but natural, felt very much pleased there was, at least, one branch of education in which, poor country-girl as she was, she surpassed her old friend, her fast becoming rival, Charlotte Lee.

Charlotte was vexed ; but took the trouble of trying not to appear to care for this trifling victory at all, or to consider it one. Indeed, if they had been two well-disposed sensible girls, who had conquered, as they should have done, the very beginning of the jealousy threatening to mar their short-lived friendship, why should one have felt she had gained a victory at all, or the other that she had suffered any defeat ?

'My brethren, these things ought not so to be.'

Charlotte flung herself on the sofa after breakfast and declared herself too tired to go out ; which, as she had arranged with Mary the night before to walk to Marshlands woods (now glorious with hyacinths and primroses), and there read and work the whole morning, Mary thought very rude. However, she was too proud to show she felt herself slighted, professed sorrow for Charlotte's fatigue and offered to stay and read with her indoors instead ; but Mrs. Hughes, who had heard the plan arranged with mutual pleasure the night before, was too kind-hearted to allow the fatigue of one of the party so completely to mar it, and said Brown should drive the three girls to the woods at ten and

fetch them back again in time for the one o'clock dinner.

'Why, who has lost their powers of locomotion?' asked Mr. Hughes, looking up from his paper again.

'Lotta is tired,' answered his wife; 'but it is a pity the girls should lose spending such a lovely morning out of doors on her account.'

'Yes, certainly; only as the woods are but three quarters of a mile off, I scarcely see why Brown should be taken twice from his work in one morning.'

'Oh, very well,' answered Charlotte, huffed at once; 'pray don't have the carriage out on my account. It was not my proposal at all, John. I should have known you better than to make it!'

'Come, Lotta, speak plainly, please,' said John Hughes, good-humouredly, 'and tell me what your inuendos mean; that I have ever grudged you reasonable use of man or horse yet?'

Charlotte felt rather uneasy under the steady, good-natured gaze which accompanied these words, but she avoided a direct answer, replying, crossly, 'I don't at all want to go; indeed, as you are all so disagreeable, I had much rather stay at home.'

'Well, I suppose your *all* means Emmie, who has offered the pony-carriage, and I who object to its going out twice in one morning (without real need that is),' pursued Mr. Hughes, not quite forbearing enough to let the subject be settled amongst the ladies alone, 'so I am afraid by staying at home you will scarcely escape your foes.'

‘How disagreeable you are, John!’ cried Charlotte, her cheek flushing.

‘Am I? I am very sorry. Well,’ always good-natured at the bottom, ‘have the pony-carriage both ways if you like; I would not run any risk of separating yourself and your friend the last morning.’

Charlotte was not at all sure that Mary was a friend any longer: nay, knew she had professed fatigue on purpose to vex and get rid of her guest.

‘No thank you,’ she answered, grandly, still much offended; ‘I prefer staying at home. Lucy and Mary will not mind going without me, I have no doubt,’ she added, tossing her pretty little head.

Now there was nothing at which John Hughes took more exception than this scornful toss of his young sister-in-law’s head, and so he answered, rather sharply, ‘No, indeed, I scarcely think they will, if you mean to treat them to the temper and airs that you have been lavishing on myself—very unbecoming airs, I can tell you, Lotta;’ and the Rector left the room.

‘My dear Charlotte,’ began gentle Mrs. Hughes, expostulatively.

She could imagine nothing more heart-breaking nor terrible than John Hughes’ displeasure.

‘Well, what do you want me to do, Emmie? Go and beg his pardon, I suppose!’ said the younger sister, scornfully; ‘that I will never do, let him be as cruel as he likes.’

‘Dear Lotta, indeed, John——’

'Is never cruel, I suppose? wasn't cruel in prejudicing papa against kind, dear Mrs. Lavender, taking us away from a home where we were so happy to—to bring us to his own—nasty—' Here Charlotte's eyes filled with tears, and she dashed out of the room, being a little ashamed that Mary Arnold should see her in the passion of sobs which followed this outburst, in her own room.

'Oh, dear! how sorry I am,' said poor Mrs. Hughes, as Charlotte thus disappeared; 'do go after her, dear Lucy, and tell her I am sure John never meant to hurt her feelings; and as for grudging her the use of the pony-carriage, would never have dreamt of such a thing. I am sure, if he had known she was really tired, he would never have made any objection to its fetching you back as well as taking you.'

'Oh, but dear Emmie, I don't think she is really tired, only did not want to go,' said simple Lucy; then seeing how shocked, in spite of good-breeding, Mary Arnold looked; 'that is, I hardly see how she can be tired; you know it was so wet yesterday we could hardly get out at all.'

'Then do go to her, Lucy, and make her go.'

'Oh, I can't make her, Emmie. Indeed I think we had better go without her.'

'I could not bear that, poor girl!—then I will go myself.'

But Mrs. Hughes did not look as if she much liked the prospect before her.

'Indeed, Emmie, it would be of no use. She doesn't really wish—care to go, I am sure. If you really like to go, Mary, I think we had much better

start at once, and then when we come back, Lotta will be all right again.'

'Well, if you really think so,' hesitated the poor wife and sister; 'but are you not tired, Mary? are you sure you would not like the pony-carriage?'

The young wife could not be quite easy unless John were cleared of all possibility of blame, by the man and pony being used twice.

'Oh no, thank you,' answered Mary at once, and seeing Mrs. Hughes's perplexities, and thinking thus at least to rid her of themselves, 'don't you think, Lucy, we had better go and get ready at once? and then, as you say, we shall have almost a morning with Charlotte after we come back.'

And as this was what Lucy herself not only wished, but knew to be the kindest treatment of her sister, in ten minutes more the two girls were off, and Mrs. Hughes trying to forget her troubles in her nursery. John could not be wrong, indeed was always so very forbearing to Charlotte; but still she could not bear to lay all blame on her sister any more than on her husband.

As Mr. Hughes was busy writing a sermon in the study all the morning, Charlotte's passionate half-hour's tears upstairs, the sullen, defiant spirit in which she came down again, the cutting replies she had invented to meet the sorrow and apologies she expected and fancied her due, were all lost upon the Rector, who did not meet his sister-in-law till dinner, when, in spite of Charlotte's severe silence, or witheringly short answers, he would, much to her provocation, persist in treating her in the most natural and friendly manner, as if which was the

truth as far as he was concerned, they were the best friends in the world.

Brown drove Mary back to Aggesden in time for tea ; Lucy accompanied her, stayed tea, and was driven back just before dusk. Mr. and Mrs. Hughes were engaged to dine out, but still Charlotte would not go with Mary, and the formal kisses which the two girls exchanged at parting were very different from Charlotte's warm, lively embrace on Mary's arrival, or from the then quiet heartiness of Mary's own kiss.

' Well, Mary,' said the Vicar that evening as the Marshlands pony-carriage, with Lucy, passed out of sight on its way home again, ' and how has your friendship stood three days' close intimacy ?'

Mary rather coloured and hesitated. ' Charlotte is very—very accomplished and pretty,' she said at last.

' Ah !—poor Mary,' said her father, comprehending all at once ; ' we never can distinguish an acquaintance from a friend till we have been left wholly upon an acquaintance's mercy, as in a few days' visit. Of how many an admiration, affection, attraction, does two or three such days disenchant one !'

' I like her rather—only—'

' The young lady with all her accomplishments wants solidity. I never did think you could be satisfied with such a girl, as your *friend*, Mary ; but she may be a very pleasant acquaintance still.'

The Vicar meant kindly to console his daughter for the disappointment she had suffered, and so he

did ; but his words were rather injudicious notwithstanding ; or rather Mary's disposition led her to find in them a power of harming her that only a girl of such a thoughtful mind, and also so eager to win approbation, could have extracted from words forgotten by her father almost as soon as uttered. ' Papa thinks Charlotte frivolous, but myself *solid*,' was the chief of poor Mary's consolation for that week's disappointment, as she lay awake thinking over the Marshlands visit that night, ' and—I am almost sure Mr. Hughes thinks just the same. I wish I had remembered that Anne of Austria, just like Elizabeth of France, had been meant for Don Carlos instead of—' but here Mary's visions of the impression she might have made at Marshlands that morning became very hazy, and in three minutes she was asleep. Would that she had fallen asleep with a prayer for help against the jealousy and rivalry beginning so fiercely to assail her.



CHAPTER XIX.

CLEAR SHINING AFTER RAIN.

Could ye bless him—father—mother ?

Bless the dimple in his cheek ?

Dare ye look at one another,

And the benedictions speak ?

Would ye not break out in weeping,

And confess yourselves too weak.

E. B. BROWNING.

THE next day (Friday), not only was Miss Wardale expected at Marshlands, but John home.

‘Why, Nancy,’ said the Vicar to his wife, as Anna was wondering what Lucy’s new governess would be like, ‘I wonder we never thought of asking the Hughes’ to arrange that their governess and our boy should travel together. I don’t like the dear fellow’s having no one to look after him.’

‘But, papa,’ said Harry, ‘he is so well now, he wouldn’t at all like being looked after.’

‘And,’ said Mrs. Arnold, her eyes glistening, ‘Johnnie is such a polite little fellow that, now he can move about, *he* would always have been ‘looking after’ Miss Wardale, have carried her baskets and shawls, and committed all kinds of courteous follies, I dare say.’

That morning seemed very long to all ; really, the Vicar thought Harry’s lessons never would be over ; and his wife that first ten, then eleven,

then twelve, then dinner-time, would never come. But come and go each hour did in turn, and all too quickly to many of their fellow-creatures, then happy in fruition.

The Vicar drove his wife over to meet their son. And, when they returned, to see John enter the house on foot ! Now his mother could first pour out her overflowing happiness ; once more lay the fair young head upon her shoulder, once more smooth the waving, sunny hair ; once more, as just one year ago, wet his cheek with blessed tears of joy.

I do not wonder that the Vicar did not see all this ; he had slipt from amongst his children, his own eyes filled with like blessed tears, to give thanks unto the Father who had restored his son to him, and given a hope which was almost a certainty, that the cup of bitterness of the last nine months might not yet be required to be drunken to the dregs.

Then, when he came back, what a loving fuss he made with his boy ; so afraid of his doing too much, he could not be content till John had promised to lie down till tea-time, and then sitting by his side in his old place ; but oh, with what a different heart !—one almost as much oppressed with happiness as when last there with care and dread.

‘ And how did you leave them all ? ’ was asked at last, in the silence which followed the first half-hour’s burst.

‘ Oh, very well ; and Ellinor will like so much to come, mamma. You can’t think how pleased she looked when I read that bit of your letter.

Mamma, you don't know how kind they have all been to me!

'God bless them!' said the mother, her lip quivering; yet, looking at her boy, she could not wonder that, go where he would, friends never failed him.

'And I told you, didn't I?—oh yes, of course—that Miss Hopkins, when she found how fond I was of drawing, used to come every day to teach me, and you know, mamma, she learnt of Copley Fielding, and he always called her one of his best pupils; just think what the lessons were worth! See what one gets by being laid up.'

'Ah! I remember thinking her sketches surpassed even Sophy's,' said the Vicar. But this was a mistake of the good Vicar's; when he did see Miss Hopkins' drawings, he had thought they more nearly approached Sophy Merivale's in power and skill than those of any amateur he had yet seen. We do not say, however, that his latter conclusion was not the better founded of the two; indeed, are inclined to think it was.

'And I don't believe any master would have been so patient, and careful, and punctual,' continued John. 'Let it pour with rain, or be so thick a fog one could not see the gate, she always came exactly at two. She thought, I know, that I wanted her even more on bad days than fine ones, and so I did.'

'I hope, at least, she was satisfied with your progress.'

'Yes, I think she was,' answered John, simply; 'or, at any rate' (with his old sunny smile), 'she was

polite enough to say so, and actually, yesterday, sent me in six of her drawings to bring home to copy, saying I could return them when Ellinor goes back, and such a beautiful moist-colour paint-box, as 'a little remembrance of her'—as if I could ever forget her, mother !

'Well, but Antoinette,' said the Vicar ; 'to think we have never done more than just hear she was well, when you slept in Carlton Terrace last night.'

'Did oo see the baby ?' cried Mabel, eagerly.

'Yes, this morning, and gave it a kiss for your—for its mother's sake, I think,' corrected truthful Johnnie. 'But yesterday afternoon I had tea with Cousin Netta, up in her room, mamma, and you can't think how lovely she looked. I do think she is the prettiest mother in the world.'

'She must be,' said the Vicar.

'And is the baby really to be Henry Hector ?' asked Anna, anxiously.

'Yes, Sir Hector and Mr. Booth, the Rector of Bury Duthoyte, are to be godfathers, and Sophy godmother. Netta asked if I wouldn't stay to the christening ; do you know, for a moment, I did almost wish I could.'

'No, Johnnie, I don't believe it,' said the Vicar.

'Well, no ; at least I wanted a great deal more to come home ;' and John laid his hand upon his father's, as of old, when either sad or happy.

Four months' absence had not changed the boy. God bless him !

Tea came at last, and then the Vicar did let him get up.

'Why, John, what a length you are !' he cried.

‘As tall as mamma, I declare!’ cried Anna; ‘do stand next her and see.’

John drew himself up—tall, slight, blithe little fellow! no, *little* no longer, nor indeed ever, save that one loves to call those one loves ‘little and good.’ As tall as mamma!—no, taller. ‘Why, John, and not fourteen yet!’ and the Vicar looked a little anxious.

‘Fourteen next month, papa, and lying down makes one grow you know,’ said John, merrily; ‘but Mr. Jones did say, of course I must be the more careful. I passed him a long time ago;’ and he held up his head proudly.

‘Why, Frank will look quite a dwarf beside you,’ said the father.

‘Ah, Frank!’ repeated John, ‘how I wish he were here! it’s all one wants;’ and then a little silence fell again on all.

John was starting for a walk with Mary and Harry after tea, but the Vicar would allow of no such exertion after his journey, and the boy bore the prohibition very cheerfully. What *great* privation would he not have endured daily to repay some little of that father’s exceeding care for him? so why not the little one required, that of this care being carried on a little longer than was needful?

The Vicar went to sit by his son after he was in bed, Johnnie having proudly declared his superiority to all *valets de chambre* now. And then the father and son touched on other matters than those on which their conversation had turned amongst the large home party.

‘Father,’ said John, stretching out his hand again, ‘you know I went to church on Wednesday ; there was only the Litany and prayers, so I could sit and stand all right. I—I was thinking—Lady Merivale is away, isn’t she?’

‘Yes, my boy.’

‘Whether I couldn’t go to church next Sunday and be there ; you know the pew is so high no one would see if I did lie down during the sermon, and if they did it wouldn’t hurt me,’ with a flush, but a quiet smile.

‘No, indeed.’

‘And—I should so like to give thanks, and for—you to give thanks for me.’

‘Thanks for us all, my precious boy.’

‘Papa,’ began John, with a half smile, then growing serious again, ‘do you know,’ hurriedly, ‘I do hope I shall never let church seem a burden again. Oh, it was such a blessing on Wednesday!’

‘Has it seemed a burden, my boy?’

‘It used, very often,’ answered John, colouring high.

‘I am sure you never gave outward evidence of it, John. I always heard your responses as clearly as dear Mary’s.’

‘Oh! but papa, so often I was thinking of my lessons, or cricket, or anything else all the time. I do so hope I shall not now.’

‘You must pray and try as well as hope, John.’

‘I meant that. Dear father, to think I may be a soldier after all ; and the boy flung his arms round the Vicar’s neck.

‘Yes, if you don’t do such rash things as that every day,’ answered the father, loosing the young arms, but so speaking because his heart was too full for further words. ‘There, good night, my boy. God bless you for ever and ever ;’ and so he left his son.



CHAPTER XX.

JOHN HUGHES' TRIALS.

Under no circumstances, whether of pain, or grief, or disappointment, or irreparable mistake, can it be true that there is not something to be *done*, as well as something to be suffered. * * There is a Past which is gone for ever. But there is a Future which is still our own.

F. W. ROBERTSON.

FRANK meanwhile had in many ways been prospering at school far more this quarter than last. The truth of the homely old proverb, 'give a dog a bad name and hang him,' had been sadly verified in Frank's home life. What boy of his temper, always expected to do wrong, would often care to do right? But at Market Rayston, Frank Arnold had had the opportunity of a fresh and fair start, and happily this was opened to him when his heart was softened, and he was longing to give his father some satisfaction in the place of all the trouble and pain he had hitherto cost him, or at least to cost him pain and trouble no longer. Yet Frank scarcely believed when leaving home that his father did more than from exceeding pity tolerate him,—was not, although sending him to school at such a cost, rather glad to be rid of him.

Now that Mr. Kelme and this scholar at least understood one another, Frank's Rayston career was prosperous and satisfactory. He had been

working very hard all the quarter, for at Midsummer there would be a vacancy amongst the foundation boys, and on this vacancy had Frank set his heart. True, in many ways his home education hindered Frank in the race he was now running with those long accustomed to the requirements of a public school, but it helped him in others—modern history, geography, &c., which branches of knowledge Mr. Kelme was trying to make an essential part of the foundation, as well as all other school examinations.

Frank never told his father for what he was striving, nor even that he was striving for anything. The vacancy was, he argued, unexpected,—why tell him? If he failed, such knowledge would only occasion disappointment, and most likely he should fail; how should he expect to beat Jackson, and Barton, and that provokingly-clever little fellow Clive, six months his junior, and yet such a good classic every one thought this boy must succeed? Oh, why had he been so idle and heartless in his tasks at home? Frank began to add, why had his father let him there get through them as he had done? Why had not every imperfect lesson at the Vicarage met with the summary punishment that awaited it here? Strange that the boy should be beginning to think his father had treated him too leniently at the very time that the Vicar himself was feeling assured he had often been too harsh and unrelenting.

So as we have said Frank drudged on, and on, and on, and never let his father know that he was doing so. Neither fair nor kind, Frank, but even one year hence he would scarcely have deprived the

Vicar of the pleasure of knowing that he was exerting every power to rid him of part of the expenses of his education. But now the making any such effort at all was perhaps as much as could be expected of him.

John knew, Frank could keep no secrets from him, but John kept the secret faithfully, and when, the first time after his return that he heard from Frank, Mr. Arnold had asked whether he might see or hear part of the news, John had answered at once,

‘I have promised to burn Frank’s letters as soon as I have read them, papa.’

And the Vicar never again took any notice of the arrival of Frank’s weekly letter.

The arrival of Miss Wardale occasioned two or three weeks’ cessation of intercourse between Marshlands and Aggesden, but at the end of this time Mrs. Hughes drove over with her baby one afternoon, and asked Mary and Anna to spend the next Saturday afternoon with their old friends, coming in time for the early dinner.

Anna was extremely pleased to go, even Mary rather so, for the elder girl longed to see Miss Wardale, and liked going to Marshlands, for in spite of the mischances respecting that Andante of Beethoven’s, she felt that Mr. Hughes liked and thought well of her, and it was at least no wonder that Mary Arnold took pleasure in ‘John Hughes’s’ approbation.

Poor John Hughes! he was just now rather perturbed in mind. Miss Wardale, although satisfactory in most points, was a reserved, unsociable body, who would never let either herself or the

master and mistress of the house forget she was the governess. Charlotte had been predetermined not to like her, had she been the most charming person in the world ; though not this, she was a thorough lady and most conscientious woman, but even these good qualities Charlotte would not allow her, and when she dared, behaved toward her governess in an offhand, supercilious manner, which the once she had ventured to use it before ' John Hughes ' had made that gentleman long to box her ears. He had gazed her out of countenance at the time and lectured her severely afterwards, allowing neither sullenness, nor passion, nor tears, nor a flight from his cruelty to the door, to stop his rebuke till he had said all he meant to say, when he had opened the door for his young sister-in-law with all the courtesy in the world, and given every after opening for a reconciliation, but not one step that way would Charlotte take. Such a temper vexed and tried the good Rector beyond endurance, and now Mr. Hatherton's compassion at his nephew's being overrun with his wife's relations would not have been so entirely wasted as six months ago.

However, thus far Charlotte Lee did stand in awe of John Hughes ; she ventured before him on no repetition of her superciliousness towards Miss Wardale, and indeed, that lady had enough determination and self-respect soon to put an end to it elsewhere. But such moral coercion was not likely to make the young lady feel more amiably towards either brother-in-law or governess.

Lucy, however, went on very amicably with both. Possessing little of her sister's talent or ambition,

she had yet a sweetness of temper and docility of disposition which was speedily making her the greater favourite with all around. Lucy was in many ways childish, but Mr. Hughes, at least, greatly preferred Lucy's childishness to Charlotte's precocity. So were things going on when Mary and Anna arrived at the Rectory to make their first acquaintance with Miss Wardale.

Charlotte received Mary with far more *empressement* than Mary could honestly return, and during dinner and the early part of the afternoon, made much of her and was exceedingly lively and gracious to both her guests ; as if to show Miss Wardale and Mr. Hughes how charming and pleasant she could be when she chose. But Mary could not respond to this return of affection, she remembered too vividly the slights and ill-humour to which Charlotte had subjected her three months ago, ever to trust her caresses or temper again ; and as was but natural, Charlotte, finding her pretty embraces and friendly advances so coldly received, relapsed into her old sullenness, and had the satisfaction of vexing Mary heartily many times before the day was over.

‘Never mind that silly girl, Mary,’ said Mr. Hughes, as Charlotte made some sarcastic inuendo as Mr. Hughes offered his young guest his arm to the dining-room ; ‘you must feel you are worth twenty Charlotte Lees, any day.’

Mary only coloured and felt rather awkward and abashed, for Mr. Hughes evidently meant what he said ; still, knowing this to be her host's opinion, submitted to Charlotte's ignorance of her existence during the meal that followed much more equably

than she could have done had she not had such consciousness to sustain her.

Music followed tea, Charlotte playing first, and rattling off a piece she knew her brother-in-law abhorred, calling it 'The murder of 'Sweet Home!'' Mary took her place, playing the 'War March' from *Athalie*, and now having her wits about her, heightened the stool, found the pedals before beginning, and, encouraged by her host's late approbation, played it with so much spirit and force, Miss Wardale thought the 'Well done!' to which Mr. Hughes gave utterance, adding the remark, 'that is something like music.'

Anna was still not yet to be persuaded to play in public, so she and Lucy slipped away to the garden and sauntered about chatting incessantly till a quarter to eight, when the Vicar arrived at Marshlands to walk back with his daughters; a plan on which both girls had long set their hearts, and a wish, now Daisy was a little lame, which he had been very happy to indulge.

'Well, and what do you think of Miss Wardale?' he asked, as they started brisk and blithe on a walk which proved rather too long before it was over.

'Don't you think she must have been very nice looking?' said Mary; 'and she seems so clever, only—'

'She is not a bit like dear Miss Storey,' sighed Anna.

'She is too old to be such a friend,' said Mary; 'and do you know she was quite rich once, but has been a governess now twenty years; yes, twenty

years, for Mrs. Hughes said she was only three-and-twenty when she first went out.'

'Poor thing !' said the Vicar, heartily.

'Because she was rich once ? yes, that must make it much harder,' continued Mary, thoughtfully ; 'perhaps it is that makes her seem so proud and cold, more—more like Lady Agnes than—'

'I am so glad we have Miss Storey,' was Anna's conclusion as Mary stopped short.

'So am I,' said Mr. Arnold ; 'I am very glad, children, that you have found a friend in your governess.'

'I think Miss Wardale would be a friend to Charlotte and Lucy, if they would let her,' said Mary.

'Oh, Lucy is a friend,' cried Anna, eagerly ; 'she says she likes her very, very much, much better than Mrs. Lavender.'

'Oh, is poor Charlotte still hankering after her West End school ?' asked the Vicar, smiling In the early spring, Mr. Hughes had told him, as a good joke, of his young sister-in-law's intense indignation at his having ventured to give Colonel Lee his opinion of Mrs. Lavender's system of instruction.

'Oh, yes ; she can't bear Miss Wardale, says she hates her ; and Lucy says Mr. Hughes was so angry once at Charlotte's turning her——'

'Anna, you shouldn't,' said Mary, in a warning undertone.

Anna coloured. 'Yes, Mary is right, Nancy ; no tales out of school ; and, after all, it does Charlotte credit to prefer old friends to new ones.'

Meanwhile Mr. Hughes was pacing his garden,

his wife on his arm, discussing the same perverse young lady.

‘How can she be so rude and pretend to be a gentleman’s daughter!’ cried John Hughes, angrily. ‘I wont have Mary Arnold here again to be treated in this way.’

‘Well, but dear John, she was vexed, poor girl, at your taking no notice of her music, and then praising Mary’s—not but that Mary does play remarkably well.’

‘My dear Emmie, do you mean that was what first offended her? No, it was Mary Arnold’s not choosing to be thrown aside and taken up again at her friend’s captious pleasure. Besides, did she not play that piece because she knows I hate to hear that dear old air torn to shreds, and then strangled to death in those absurdly difficult variations? Now, I think it was excessively rude of her to play that piece at all.’

‘But she plays it so well.’

‘Yes; but she is not a young lady of only *one* piece by any means. However, I wont quarrel with her about that, but I do most decidedly object to her treatment of Mary Arnold, and I shall tell her I will not have such airs played off in my house, whatever she may do elsewhere.’

‘Oh, dear John, pray don’t speak to her again; it does no good,’ cried Mrs. Hughes, anxiously.

‘Some good; she has not ventured on them a second time with Miss Wardale.’

‘But——’

‘What, Emmie?’ looking, with a smile, into her face.

'It makes her not love you half so much——'

'Makes her dislike me more than ever, you mean. Well, Emmie, it is very disagreeable to be so disliked by a member of one's own household ; but as I forced her here against her will, I must make up my mind to bear her dislike as I best can.'

'I did think Mary would have been such a nice friend for her,' sighed Mrs. Hughes.

'Charlotte's incapable of appreciating her—wants some girl who will consent to be patronized. Addie Willis, you'll see, who looks with such awe on poor Lotta because she can speak French and German, and rattle off twice as many notes in a second as most people, will suit her far better.'

'Oh, John, I hope not.'

'But she will ; Mary Arnold is far too well-informed and sensible for Lotta. One is all solidity, the other mere flash.'

'You are thinking about Philip II. ; but John, I could not remember anything about his fourth wife any more than Lotta.'

'No ; but then I did not ask you to be my wife because you were either the cleverest woman in the world or thought yourself so, as poor Lotta does, but because you were the dearest——' stopping all further disagreeable discourse with a kiss.

Charlotte took the very gentle remonstrance finally administered, in a far more dignified, if not far more irritating manner, than the last indignant rebuke ; sat it calmly out, playing with her rings, and when it was over rose and said scornfully,

'Thank you. But I tell you what, John Hughes,'

her eyes flashing, 'I will write to my father this very mail and tell him how you treat me, and we shall see then if, in his next letter, he will thank you as he does now, poor, deluded old man! for your exceeding kindness in taking us in. I wish,' with a hearty spitefulness far more suited to her years, 'the horrid old place had been burnt down first.'

'My dear, you almost tempt me to wish so too,' answered Mr. Hughes, mildly, but with simple, if wearied dignity; 'indeed, if we cannot agree better, I shall myself write to Colonel Lee and state, that all things considered, a school life best suits yourself. I will spare him the pain of knowing that you systematically set the master of the house at defiance, thereby setting an evil example which I cannot allow Lucy, my own little daughter, or even my servants to have much longer before their eyes.'

This rather alarmed and abashed poor Charlotte, and when, in her turn, she was asked to spend a half-holiday at Aggesden, she behaved herself very pleasantly, perfectly charming Johnnie, whom she particularly laid herself out to please, and who had seen no one so pretty or graceful since he had left Carlton Terrace. He sat by her in the garden, fetched her parasol, turned over the leaves of her music-book, in fact, was quite *épris*.

Indeed, so bright, pleasant, and amusing had the young lady made herself to all, that as soon as she was gone Mr. Arnold hastened to atone for his past ready harsh judgment, and began a stream of praise, which both his wife and John

carried on warmly, whilst Mary sat by, annoyed and silent.

'I never heard any girl play with such perfect facility,' said the Vicar; 'that was always a great charm in Netta, but I don't think even she, at Charlotte Lee's age, played either so well or so brilliantly.'

'And her eyes and hair are so pretty,' added John; but this did not irritate Mary as her father's speech had done. She knew in beauty of face and feature Charlotte Lee must always surpass her, although there was a peculiar charm in Mary's tall, slight figure, stiff and staid as it still was, which placed the *tout ensemble* of the two girls far more nearly on a par than either knew.

Next time the Arnolds went to Marshlands, John and Harry were asked also, and again Charlotte was all gaiety and graciousness, only sent Johnnie on so many errands and kept him sauntering so long by her side, that the poor little fellow's back ached sadly all night, and kept him long awake. But who, to please so fair a lady, would not endure some pain and a few hours' sleeplessness?

Meanwhile, time had been passing swiftly away at Market Rayston, and the day of election was close at hand. Frank worked on, and on, and on. Often, Mr. Kelme seeing the boy's heavy eyes and weary brow, thought he would advise him to give himself a little more holiday; but he never did, for he felt truly that Frank Arnold would go his own way, and therefore he had better spare himself the trouble of speaking.

'I do hope young Arnold will be the conqueror,' said Mrs. Kelme to her husband, as they sauntered

about their little town garden the night before the Examination.

‘So do I. I can’t help liking that fellow more and more, unpromising and *dur* as he seemed at first. He will beat Jackson and Barton again and again, of that I’m sure, behind them as he was in many things half-a-year ago. That little Clive is the antagonist I fear for him.’

‘And he is such a little fellow. I do think big boys ought to have first chance.’

‘My dear Janet! then you would have kept Napoleon and Wellington out of the army, until every one above five-feet six, who wanted a commission, had received their heart’s desire.’

‘No, no, David; but it will be very provoking for boys of Barton’s and Arnold’s age—’

‘And size?’

‘Yes, size, too, to be beaten by little Clive.’

‘Ah! but Clive is such a clever, industrious little fellow that I am sure Jackson and Barton will have to support that mortification, and half fear Arnold will have to do the same. Only, I have always noticed, when that boy has determined to do anything, he generally accomplishes it, and I am convinced he has set his whole heart on this foundationship.’

‘Well, I always consider him my friend in the school. You can’t think how often I used to stop him in High-street, to have a little chat; but I never seem to meet him now.’

‘Ah! I’m afraid he’s overdoing it; but Arnold’s no more likely to act on unasked advice than myself, so I’ve held my tongue. However, if he do

lose the foundation, he'll gain old Sir Adam's ten guineas as second-best ; for I'm sure neither Barton nor Jackson will ever pass him.'

'Sir Adam must have been second-best somewhere himself, I think,' said Mrs. Kelme, 'and so have been taught sympathy with the world's unfortunates. What a pity it is only one can ever be first.'

'A great pity, my dear ; as great as that, multiply nought by a thousand it will remain only a nought still. Yes, Sir Adam must have been a very benevolent old man, and I wish, as I am sure you do, that there were two vacancies to be competed for instead of one.'

Frank had indeed set his heart on this foundation vacancy ; had strained every nerve to gain it, had worked early and late, and on holidays ; had prayed as he had never prayed for anything but John's recovery before, for success.

He lay long awake this last night, reckoning up the chances of victory. Of Barton and Jackson he felt little fear ; but 'Clever Clive !' Here the boy felt far less safe. And yet, when Frank had willed to do anything, the way had so seldom failed him that he could not anticipate failure even here. And so he fell asleep, dreaming, half asleep half waking, of his father's surprise and pleasure, his mother's kiss, John's joy, and, most lasting satisfaction of all, of Miss Storey's dismissal being no longer a necessity. If Mary thought her loss at Frank's gain an injustice, Frank tenfold more so considered it.

But—he was beaten ! Highly complimented,

to be sure ; told that Clive had won the race but by a hair's-breadth, whilst Jackson and Barton, the seniors of both, had been left far behind ; and Dr. Wortley handed old Sir Adam Beaseley's quaint donation of ten guineas to young Arnold, with the kindly wish that he should yet have the pleasure of, at no very distant day, proclaiming him first. Frank took the gold and silver with a bow, strongly tempted to fling it at once out of window, and have done with it.

He stayed the few remaining proceedings out ; indeed, could do no less. Mr. Kelme glanced once or twice towards him, fearing the disappointment had cut him to the quick ; but, though Frank's eyes were dark and his lips white, could not say either were darker or paler than they had often been of late, and, occupied with the duties and guests such a day always brings with it, did not find either time or opportunity to speak to the 'seconder,' before Frank Arnold, with others whose homes could be reached in one day, were already on their way to the station.

'What, four?' he said, looking at his watch, when the last of the luncheon-guests had departed, 'and I declare, I have never said one word to poor Arnold ; he must be off by this time.'

'But I have,' said his wife. 'I sent and asked him to come and say good-bye ; I thought it might please him. Poor boy, you can't think how haggard and sad, and utterly down-hearted he seemed when he came in—hardly noticed even Janie, and only answered 'yes, ma'am,' and 'no, ma'am,' to whatever I said.'

'Ah, poor fellow! I know what that sullen, dogged way of his means, now.'

'But—but I made him cry before he left me,' said little Mrs. Kelme, triumphantly, and yet brushing her hand across her own eyes.

'Well, that's more than I can boast of ever having done, certainly,' answered the head master, looking fondly on his wife.

'I am not going to tell you what he told me, though,' resumed Mrs. Kelme, trying to smile and be bright. 'I only know, if I were a rich woman, I'd found a scholarship for poor clergymen's sons to-morrow!'

'Take care, Janie, or you will *let out* what young Arnold told you. So they are not rich? Well, really, the sum I take for Jackson, Gledstones, and Arnold is merely nominal—only pays for books, board, and Barnes—horrid little Barnes!'

Whilst Mr. Kelme and his wife were thus discussing him, Frank was travelling homewards. Poor Frank!—his head ached and throbbed; his heart was full of misery and unrest. He wished instead of getting into the railway carriage he could have flung himself beneath its wheels; and yet, as three of his schoolfellows were his companions as far as Worcester, he sat up and talked, and hid his wound and its bleeding as he best could.

But it was a very deep one. Frank Arnold has not yet forgotten, will never forget, the stab of that disappointment. John was getting well; the effects of one injury he had done his home passing away, he had set his whole heart on gaining this scholarship; on relieving his father from the burden of his

education, his sisters from the evil about to be inflicted for his sake. But God had willed otherwise. Frank Arnold must learn the bitter lesson which the Vicar had tried to teach his little girl a year and a half ago—that, alas! repent them as we may, we cannot repair the effects of our sins just when and as we choose; that the times of reparation are in His hands alone. He only knows whether they will ever be within our own longing grasp.

Thomas drove John over to meet the schoolboy; the Vicar thought the two boys would like to ride home side by side, and have the first burst and meeting beyond his ken. It did give poor Frank a thrill of joy to see John standing on the platform awaiting him; but when John left the driver's seat to himself, as a matter of course, and leant back idle whilst trunk and bag were being stowed away, his old misery returned tenfold.

‘Frank?’ asked John, eagerly, as they drove off.

Frank shook his head. John put his arm through his brother's, but said not a word; and he knew Frank best.

Frank came home a disappointed boy; no wonder his silence, sadness, and ill-looks, disappointed his father, especially when on obtaining his report, by asking for it, he found how advanced a standing he had gained in the school, and how highly his conduct and diligence were approved. He turned round with some kind words of pleasure on his lips, but Frank's set, unaffectionate face, seemed to chill them before uttered, and the Vicar passed the paper on to his wife in silence.

‘Why, Frank,’ she said, ‘surely you have got

up in the school wonderfully ; were not you put into——'

But Frank had slipped away, was upstairs in his old room, had shut the door, and bolted John out.

But he could not bar him out at night ; and then, unpacking, he flung him across the ten guineas, saying, bitterly—

' You see, I haven't worked quite for nothing.'

' No, indeed ! What do you mean to do with them ?'

' Bury or burn them.'

' Oh, Frank !'

' You needn't look so shocked, John ; if you were in my place you'd have a little more pity.'

' Pity ! Oh dear, dear Frank ;' and John could rise and go to him now ; ' I am so very sorry—but as papa never knew, *he* isn't disappointed.'

' He doesn't care for me,' said Frank, quickly.

' He does ! he was going to drive me in to meet you this afternoon, only then thought, I am sure, we would rather meet without him. But I tell you what does disappoint him, your being so low, and seeming so ill, when he hoped school would have done you so much good. Frank, if I were you, I would tell him all about it.'

' Perhaps you have ?' half sneeringly.

' Oh, no ; but I would. He would help and comfort you ; and I feel sure it would be such a comfort to him to know that you have not looked so wretched as this all the half year ; that it is only overwork and disappointment that have upset you now. And—why not give him the ten guineas ?'

‘He would not take them.’

‘He would! I wish I had ever earned as much,’ with a sigh. ‘Frank, I tell you what,’ joyfully, ‘they would all but keep Miss Storey another quarter.’

‘No; would they?’

‘Yes; she has only fifty pounds a year, I know; for I heard papa and mamma saying the other day she ought to ask for much more in her next place.’

‘If she’s got another place, it’s too late.’

‘But she didn’t take it; there were too many children; and another was at Lichfield, and she did not want to go to a town. I believe it is, myself, she won’t engage herself anywhere else, she wants so to stay on here, and is always hoping something may turn up; and it has, Frank, at least for three months—your ten guineas will all but do it.’

Frank made no answer, but leant his head upon his hands more thoughtfully than sadly.

‘How I hated her at first,’ he said.

‘You didn’t know her then.’

‘No. I don’t think she’s a lady now; but she’s all very well in her way, and she must teach the girls cleverly, or papa wouldn’t have kept her on, and think so well of her.’

‘Now, Frank, go down and be quick about it,’ said John, caressingly, with the saucy smile Frank loved to see in his face again—the smile with which this time last year he had defied many a threat, met many an unkind taunt; ‘I want to get into bed, I can tell you.’

‘Yes,’ said Frank, thoughtfully, ‘I am going. I think I ought;’ and he rose and went.

Mr. Arnold was sitting up alone in the drawing-room, seeming to read, in reality thinking sadly how utterly, heavily as it had cost him, the remedy for Frank's temper and low spirits had failed. He had not cared to come home, to meet John or his mother.

'Sir,' said Frank, 'I want to tell you something.'

Poor Mr. Arnold fully expected to hear that Frank had left school in some deep disgrace, very likely mostly unmerited, at least originally; but no doubt plenty of temper and insubordination had been shown since.

'I have been trying to get on the foundation, but have failed,' continued Frank, in a calm, indifferent voice; 'however, ten guineas are given to the next boy; there they are, and if you don't mind, I should like you to keep Miss Storey a little longer with them.'

'But they are yours, Frank; you may hereafter—'

'I don't want them,' interrupted Frank, trying to be surly, really very sad.

'You want something, Frank; ' sadly and kindly too.

'I wanted the scholarship,' said the poor boy, groaning and turning away his head.

'Frank, come and sit down here; tell me all about it,' said the father; 'you worked hard for it, I am sure; but a home-educated boy cannot all at once compete advantageously with those well used to the routine of a public school.'

'But he was six months younger,' Frank almost sobbed.

‘Perhaps a genius, then ? which neither you nor I can pretend to be.’

Frank smiled. ‘I’m sure I don’t know about that, only I did think work would get it.’

‘And you never told me you were trying,’ said Mr. Arnold, a little reproachfully.

‘John made me tell now—I thought if I did not get it, you would not be disappointed, sir.’

‘Yes, but this ‘sir,’ is your father, and the pleasure of knowing you have done your best far exceeds any disappointment in the issue of the struggle. Perhaps the successful boy wanted the scholarship even more than you did.’

‘He cared to gain it just as much, but he didn’t want it—that is what makes it so hard.’

‘You mean his parents are richer than yours ?’

‘He’s only a mother, but she’s as well off as—’

‘Never mind, Frank, we won’t grudge a widow such a pleasure ; thank you for the trial all the same, but I am rather a richer man myself than last year. Mr. Hatherton has put me in the way of some literary work : you will keep my secret, I know ; I have no desire to be looked upon as ‘a gentleman what writes.’’

‘I don’t see why you should work any harder,’ said Frank, fiercely.

‘It is more pleasure than toil, Frank ; John does most of the work—fair copying ; and when you are a father yourself, you will know that finding another opening for exertion, far from increasing, lightens the burden of life.’

‘Papa, let me copy for you.’

‘You shall, Frank, and thank you. But now, if

you are not too tired, I want to hear all about this election ; how long have you been reading for it ?

And the Vicar did not let Frank go till he had drawn out all the excitement, over-work, hopes and fears, and final disappointment it had cost his son.

‘Well, Frank,’ he said, as at last they wished good-night, ‘you cannot tell what pleasure your having made such an effort has given me.’

‘Good-night, sir. Papa, I can’t thank you for all you say and do, as Johnnie would.’

‘Deeds are the best thanks, Frank, and these you have given us. How happy these ten guineas will make one heart—Miss Storey’s ; you don’t know how many red eyes we have had lately.’

Frank smiled. Yes, he had indeed worked not ‘quite for nothing.’



CHAPTER XXI.

BRIDGET'S REPRIEVE.

When the night's darkest, then the dawn breaks.

THE Vicar told his wife of Frank's effort and comparative failure, and there, at the boy's particular desire, the history of the last three months of Frank's school-life ended, in his own family. The Vicar had insisted upon telling his wife, and told her proudly, for he knew she often thought he gave Frank credit for higher principles and aspirations than she herself could believe he possessed, although too kind-hearted to say so.

But Mrs. Arnold was very pleased at finding that Miss Storey would thus be kept at Aggesden another quarter. And if she were thus pleased, in spite of being proved wrong elsewhere, what was the little governess herself? who had stood so firmly to the fact that as she had not come into Worcestershire till three-and-twenty days after the Michaelmas quarter, she should of course not leave it till three-and-twenty days after this of Midsummer—that for peace's sake, Mr. Arnold had not contested the point, recognising at once in Bridget's still modest and quiet demeanour the most resolute determination not to be turned out of Aggesden Vicarage one day earlier than she considered legally fair.

This being the case, the girls were to have worked

on till the middle of July, when, upon Bridget's leaving, their sorrowful holidays were to have begun. Yes, even Anna, clinging round her governess' neck, had declared again and again, that if dear Miss Storey would only stay on till they were all big women, she would never ask for another holiday again.

'Miss Storey,' said the Vicar, on the Saturday morning, joining her in the garden after the lessons were over, 'you will think us very changeable people; still, I think you will forgive us, too,—we are wondering whether you can arrange to stay with us till October the twenty-second.'

'Oh, sir, *can*?' cried Bridget, eagerly, 'I would have stayed even if—'

'You *had* engaged yourself elsewhere?' with a keen but kindly smile; 'ah, you see, Miss Storey, all your cunning objections to every home we found for you, are answering far better than, poetically speaking, any cunning ought to do.'

'Oh, sir!' blushing.

'Nay, I am sure we are the chief gainers. I will leave you the pleasure of telling the children; their affection must, in some small degree, reward you for all the pains you have taken with them. Poor Mary! I am afraid she will find it no easier to part with you at Michaelmas than now.'

Mary was, indeed, delighted—so delighted, she burst into tears, and ran upstairs to have her cry out unremarked. Poor Mary, she had been growing so fast all this half-year, that often neither her temper nor spirits were equal to all the little vexations and much business of her home; her pale face was

paler, her slight figure thinner ; but Frank and John had now for so long occupied all the Vicar's spare thoughts, that though generally contriving to find some excuse for her more frequent irritability, he never discovered the real cause. Mrs. Arnold could not but be conscious that Mary was rapidly becoming as tall as herself, and remembering how she had in like case been treated at the Hall, once or twice sent her to lie down, and advised her to do so every day. Bridget far more frequently advised the same. But it was only *advice*, and *advice* forgotten, by the first at least, as soon as given, and Mary went her own way, thinking that as she never suffered aches nor pains to stand in the way of her day's work, no one had a right to make her suffer deprivation for them in her few pleasures.

Mr. Arnold attributed her frequent depression and vexation to grief at the prospect of so soon losing Miss Storey, and with some justice too. It was wonderful how brightly Mary went through her Saturday's work of darning and mending this afternoon ; even Frank, though he had only seen her a few hours before the announcement which had so cheered her had been made, could not help seeing how much pleasure Sir Adam's ten guineas were giving to two he still little liked, Miss Storey and her eldest pupil, to both of whom, however, after half-a-year's absence, his feelings were more those of indifference than dislike.

Now the difficulty was, what was to be done about Ellinor Arnold ? Thinking Miss Storey would be leaving them in the middle of July, she had been asked then to cheer up her cousins

after their governess' departure ; but now it was thought that the girls had better be granted a holiday at once, after all the regular work of the last half-year, and Cousin Ellinor be asked to pay her visit without delay. But in answer to Mrs. Arnold's letter proposing this, Mrs. William Arnold wrote back to say poor Ellinor had just sickened with the measles, that Amy seemed following her example, and she feared the disease would spread through the house. Thus, for some time at least, all chance of the unknown cousin's visit was at an end. Mary and her mother were relieved, Johnnie and Anna disappointed, so was the hospitable Vicar, and he was not wrong in thinking that Frank, though he said nothing, shared the latter feeling.



CHAPTER XXII.

LOTTA.

Lady Clara Vere de Vere,
 Of me you shall not win renown :
 You thought to break a country heart,
 For pastime, ere you went to town.

There are persons to whom a religious life seems smooth and easy. * * Endued with those aspirations which other men seem to lack—it appears as if they were born saints. * * There are others to whom it is all a trial—a whole world of passions keep up strife within. The name of the Spirit which possesses them is Legion. It is a hard fight from the cradle to the grave—up-hill work—toil all the way ; and at the last it seems as if they had only just kept their ground.

F. W. ROBERTSON.

FRANK had found, rather to his disgust, the morning after his arrival, that the two Miss Lees were engaged to dine and spend the afternoon at the Vicarage on the following Wednesday ; and ‘hating girls,’ as he told John, Wednesday came all too soon to him, though not so to Anna, who, week by week, was becoming deeper and deeper in love with her friend of the sisters.

Charlotte and Lucy arrived in very good time, and dinner passed off gaily. Charlotte wondered how so frank a little gentleman as John Arnold could own so silent and *dur* a brother as Frank ;

but was pleased to observe that little part as the schoolboy took in the conversation around him, and few as were his remarks or politenesses, he did seem a little amused by herself, had cast, at least, one admiring glance her way.

In fact, Charlotte, always pretty, looked particularly so to-day ; her bright yellow hair was wreathed in a solid plaited mass round and round the back of her elegant little head, her blue eyes and red lips sparkled with life, and her simple but fashionably-made blue muslin just became her graceful figure and bright delicacy of complexion. She was, too, in high good-humour and bent on pleasing, as indeed she was everywhere except at Marshlands Rectory.

It was an old agreement that the young people should go this day to the Hall Woods, and now when the plan was being discussed, Anna cried,

‘And let’s go over the waterfall to the Massing End, and——’

‘Oh ! Anna, that is such a scramble,’ interrupted Mary.

‘A scramble ? Oh, I like a scramble of all things,’ cried Charlotte.

‘You must secure a cavalier, Miss Lee, I assure you, if you really think of being so mad as to trust yourself to Anna’s mercy,’ said the Vicar.

‘Oh ! papa, we can never do it, and shall only get torn to pieces,’ said Mary anxiously, thinking of her own pretty pink cotton.

‘Oh ! papa, do let us,’ cried Anna ; ‘come yourself, and then you can help Charlotte, and I’ll help Mary.’

‘Oh ! do come, Mr. Arnold,’ cried Charlotte, who heartily liked the Vicar, only made a little too much of this liking before the Rector of Marshlands.

‘I wish I could, Lotta,’ answered the Vicar, equally sincerely, for he had long ceased to be in any way proof against a gracious gaiety which certainly was like the Antoinette Merivale of old times ; ‘but unfortunately I must go just the other way this afternoon.’

‘And indeed, papa, we had much better go to the real woods,’ edged in Mary.

This made Charlotte all the more determined that the idea should not be abandoned.

‘Surely you can’t really mind a scramble, Mary,’ she said ; ‘you have been used to the country all your life, and if I am not afraid, surely you cannot be ?’

‘But you know ignorance sometimes makes one bold, unduly bold,’ said the Vicar, ‘and I advise you to go prepared to think it no cowardice to turn back, should such a course on a nearer acquaintance with Anna’s route seem advisable. But I must ask John to take my place.’

‘It will be too long and scrambling a walk for Johnnie,’ said his mother, to which the Vicar agreed, but was too discreet to pass the honour on to Frank.

Miss Lee, however, had no such scruples, nor did John’s necessary exclusion make her abandon the plan, as both Mary and John had hoped and expected.

‘But you will be so kind as to come with us, I am sure,’ said Lotta, turning with her prettiest, most gracious smile to John’s brother.

‘ Oh yes—if you like,’ was the answer, which the Vicar had awaited with amused curiosity.

In fact, Frank, *brusque* as the words and tone of his answer were, was rather pleased and flattered by one so pretty and charming as Miss Lee asking for his aid. John looked a little pained, bit his lip, and was silent, but passed the sugar to the young lady with all due courtesy the next time he saw that she required it.

Last time it had been John who was all in all, had carried her parasol, gathered her flowers, met merrily her flowing pretty chatter, been charmed with her caring for him, her pretty fears, her pretty face. This afternoon a more difficult, therefore more valued prize was within her grasp ; the old friend was forgotten, the new,—cold, silent, and *brusque* as he was, must be won. Poor Charlotte Lee, did you think of your brave old father’s one desire, that his daughters might grow up ‘ simple Christian gentlewomen ?’

So it was to Frank that Charlotte now turned, asked question after question about the waterfall and Massing Wood, till Frank was thawed by her ease and enlivened by her notice. Ah ! John, you will not care to bite your lip another day ; you will be wiser, though it may be a little sadder, for your chivalrous faith in woman will have received its first shock.

So Frank went, and really though possessing neither John’s height, good features, nor smart, manly carriage, there was a something in that firm, sullen mouth, those steady, deep-brown eyes, which made every one turn to look at him a second time ;

for still and silent as both in general were, the depth and strength of the passions lying beneath this stillness and silence which even Frank himself could not wholly conceal.

Mary very reluctantly had joined the party, but mostly stayed behind with Harry, Lucy, and Anna, as long as the lanes were straight and easy, and even when these three rushed off to anticipate difficulties, still kept in the background, looking on the pretty coquetry that Charlotte was expending on her boy-esquire with a scornful lip and angry eye. She did think Frank would have had more sense than to let a pretty face so befool him.

Then Charlotte's exclamations of fear when she saw the slender bridge spanning the waterfall, which was the only means by which the Massing Woods could be reached without making nearly a mile's *détour*, made Mary more irritated than ever, and she said, coldly,

'If this frightens you, we had better turn back at once, Charlotte ; it is nothing to the hedges and ditches we shall have to get over in five minutes.'

'Oh, but it is only that water ! But Mr. Arnold, if you would go before me—yes, so—so that I could take your hand if I feel frightened——'

'Why not take my hand all the way ?' answered Frank, straightforwardly.

'Oh, thank you ; but I don't like to be such a trouble—you will think me such a coward ;' and so Frank did, but he thought her a very pretty one, and he hated a daring, bold-faced woman or girl beyond endurance, even beyond Mr. Barnes ; thus infinitely preferred Charlotte's graceful becoming starts

and fears to the downright, unshrinking pleasure with which Anna encountered bridge and bramble.

Meanwhile, John was lying vexed and moody under the acacia, a book by his side, but doing nothing save plucking the soft turf beside him. He lay undisturbed till Mabel came running up to beg him to come and see a travelling peep-show with which herself and Marianne were regaling themselves at the back door ; and then John answered, not troubling himself to turn towards her—

‘No, he was tired, and such stuff was never worth seeing.’

‘It is, Johnnie,’ said the child, peeping over his shoulder, half awed, half saucy.

‘Of course,’ answered John, condescending to turn his face her way at last.

‘Oh ! I thought it must be Frank,’ and Mabel ran away.

John sat up. ‘How stupid it is to be so cross ! but I do think, when I’ve been about with Frank all the morning, he might care to stay with me in the afternoon, when my back aches so I can’t do anything, too.’

And tears rose to John’s eyes ; but he had not discovered the true cause of his vexation yet.

But, better ; he had discovered how wrong his late exhibition of it was, sprang up, ran after little Mabel, took her up in his arms, explained all the mysteries of the show to her, delighted her with his interest, and as he felt the soft, plump arm so lovingly encircle his neck, the fair, cool face against his own flushed cheek, was ready to smile at his late troubles.

The walking party came in soon after five, mostly thoroughly tired, but Anna still in wild spirits, whilst Mary was ready to cry with vexation and weariness, and three rents in her dress, which the neatest darns could never thoroughly cover ; in truth, the poor girl had had neither strength nor spirits for the wild scramble into which Anna had inveigled them.

‘Well, John,’ said Frank, when the ladies went up to prepare for tea, ‘and what have you been doing?’

‘I!—oh, lying about,’ John answered, a little—just a little—dash of sullenness and reproach in his tone.

‘*Lying?* What, I tired you in the morning,’ cried Frank, full of concern in a moment ; ‘why didn’t you tell me? you must have wanted some one to read to you.’

Frank’s tone of sorrow and innocence made John hate himself for his late rankling resentment.

‘Oh, no!’ he answered brightly ; ‘I could have read to myself if I’d cared about it ; and mamma offered to read. So you really did cross the water-fall and get to Massing Wood?’

‘Yes ; but I’m sorry I left you.’

‘Nonsense, Frank. Why? The girls could never have managed it without you.’

‘Miss Lee’s a capital girl,’ said Frank, admiringly ; ‘how lightly she jumps—what pretty little hands and feet she has! Oh, it was such fun to see Mary so put out all the time, but obliged to be civil ;’ and Frank laughed.

At tea, Charlotte tried to divide her attentions

between the two boys, and won many a bright, amused smile, even a clever retort or two from Frank ; not so with John. He anticipated her wants as courteously as ever, had a smile, a little grave it might be, in answer to her smiles and raillery, but no more. Charlotte Lee had lost her first little gentleman esquire forever, or rather his loyal exclusive boyish devotion. Here, dissimilar as Mary and John were in many things, they did resemble one another ; one would not, the other could not, be taken up, put down, and taken up again at any one's captious will and pleasure. John was no longer jealous of Frank ; if Charlotte preferred his brother, now she had seen him, to himself, why should she not do so ? only John never thought one moment of being either Frank's rival or that of any one else in the favour of the fairest lady in the land, and withdrew from the field at once.

Anna's friendship with Lucy, as we have said, grew firmer and firmer every week—in fact, in each other, each girl had found the companion which different circumstances prevented their own older sisters from being to either. And now Anna was not satisfied till she had begged her mother to ask the two Lees to spend the next Saturday with them, in so loud a whisper, that Mrs. Arnold could do no less than repeat the invitation aloud.

‘ Oh, thank you,’ answered Charlotte, eagerly ; ‘ there is nothing we shall like so much—if John will let us.’

‘ Only Mary and Anna ought to come to us first, Lotta.’

‘ What, are you still so formal as all that ?’ inter-

posed the Vicar ; ' if you are, it is high time such formality should be put an end to. So give my best compliments to Mr. Hughes, Lotta, and tell him I request, as a personal favour, that he will allow you both to spend next Saturday afternoon with us.'

So it was settled. The Vicar helped the two young guests into the carriage, during which operation Charlotte, to her host's great amusement, consigned her bunch of faded dog-roses to Frank's keeping, and then Mr. Arnold called his wife out to see the sunset, and the two sauntered up and down the drive where most of the younger children were playing about. Frank had returned to John in the dining-room, and here Mary was already making the most of the fading light to mend her dress, whilst at her elder sister's exhortation, Anna was far more hastily gobbling up a tuck in her own frock, which had for the last three hours been looped up with pins in a manner most distracting to Mary's feelings, before joining the game in which she was longing to take part.

' I am so glad they're coming again on Saturday,' said the girl to console herself, as she stitched on impatiently.

' I suppose you are,' sighed Mary. ' I think having such friends twice a week is rather too heavy a tax.'

' Such friends ! but they are so very nice,' said Anna, perplexed.

' Yes ; Lucy is all very well, but papa will ask Charlotte, too, and I'm quite tired of entertaining her.'

' Indeed !' said Frank, ironically, ' I really never

discovered to-day that you took the trouble of entertaining Miss Lee at all.'

'Don't, Frank,' whispered John, entreatingly.

'Did I not walk five miles and tire myself to death to please her?' Mary unfortunately retorted.

'What, did you? Then I have the honour of speaking to a ghost—'

'Frank, don't be so absurd,' in a vexed, petulant tone; 'the walk was all very well for you, I dare say, and for Charlotte, too, she is quite happy when she has any one to—to flirt with, but it's—'

'Flirt!' cried Frank, springing up with crimson cheeks and flashing eyes, 'say that again if you dare.'

'It's a great deal too ugly a word to be used twice in one night,' interposed John; 'come, Frank, sit down again.'

But Frank would not do any such thing. 'Do you mean it?' he repeated.

'Yes,' said Mary, unflinchingly, her own spirit aroused, 'I do, and you will find it true to your cost some day yourself; any new face—'

'Oh, you're jealous!' interrupted Frank, sneeringly; 'jealous of pretty, graceful Charlotte Lee, poor dear!'

'Frank, you have no business to speak to me in that tone;' and Mary, finding it too dark to work neatly, went to the table, and taking up a pencil began, with rather provoking coolness, to make out a list of commissions to be executed at Worcester on the morrow.

'But it is so; you know you would like to be just as pretty and charming yourself, if you could; and how angry you would be then if any one called

that 'flirting,' retorted Frank, fiercely. 'I call that 'evil-speaking, lying, and slandering.''

'I call you very disagreeable and rude,' said poor Mary ; a most undignified and indiscreet retort.

'Oh, call me what you like,' said Frank, indifferently ; 'but give me my pencil, if you please.'

'*Your* pencil ! it is not yours.'

'It is mine ! come, I will have it by fair means or foul,' cried Frank, seizing the slender hand, which, however, only grasped the pencil tighter.

'Frank, that wont do,' said John, indignantly ; 'don't lay hands on a girl.'

'I will, when she's a slanderer and a—liar,' cried Frank, provoked beyond himself.

Mary, and it was no wonder, burst into a torrent of tears, but held the pencil tight till, by sheer force of hand, Frank tore it from her.

'There, you are satisfied, now ?' he said, coolly ; 'look at the mark, dear ; 'F.M.G.' I have believed all my life to be my initials, not yours ; but I may have been mistaken.'

'My dear Mary ! what does this mean ?' asked Mrs. Arnold, coming in for a second burst of sobs, her husband having sent her in from the evening damp, whilst staying out himself to play at hide-and-seek with the little ones amongst the dusky ever-greens of the drive.

'He—he called me a slanderer and a — liar,' sobbed Mary.

'And she is—she can't deny it !' cried Frank, fiercely.

'My dear Frank, how can you use such shocking words ?' remonstrated Mrs. Arnold, dismayed.

‘Shocking? They are true, that’s all I care for, and I’ll stand by them for ever.’

‘Indeed, you ought to beg her pardon.’

‘Beg her pardon,’ shouted Frank, ‘never! She called Charlotte Lee a flirt; she said this pencil was hers, and it’s mine.’

Mrs. Arnold had never been able to cope with Frank’s violence, and could no more do so now than a year ago, so was greatly relieved by hearing her husband’s step in the hall, and more by his looking in to say, ‘Come, Frank and Anna, we want you to join us.’

Frank stood still and silent. The room was so dark Mary’s tears were invisible; but in the silence which followed the Vicar’s speech arose a sob.

‘What, crying? Who? Not Mary over the loss of her friend, or the rents in her frock?’ he asked, good-humouredly but a little rallyingly. He scarcely knew how overgrowth weakens a girl’s health and spirits, and thought that Mary’s tears lay too near the surface for a young lady of her years.

‘Her friend?’ cried Frank, ‘I hope she doesn’t pretend she’s that and then slander her—’

‘Frank! I can’t have such words used between brother and sister.’

‘But it is true; she *is* a slanderer and a liar,’ repeated Frank, the old daring, defiant spirit within him arising all the stronger for its long suppression.

‘Frank, I am perfectly ashamed of you,’ said his father, sadly and sternly; ‘when I speak, I will be obeyed. I will not have such words used. Repeat them and I send you upstairs this minute.’

A year ago such a threat would have incited Frank to repeat them immediately. He was on the point of doing so now, but all the events of the past months, his father's forgiveness and forbearance, rushed across him, and he contented himself with saying, sullenly,

'They are true for all that.'

'I will not have them repeated in any form ; you had better leave the room.'

'I go, but you are excessively unjust, sir,' said Frank, proudly, stalking away.

This was a sad business to occur the very first week of Frank's holidays. No wonder that Mary felt it so ; that it roused all her self-control and generosity in a moment.

'Oh ! papa, don't send him away,' she cried ; 'indeed what he says is quite true. I did speak against Charlotte Lee, and I declared his pencil was mine.'

'Unfortunately nothing can justify such shocking words, and to a sister,' answered Mr. Arnold ; but this Frank did not hear. 'I did hope he would never so let his temper master him again.'

'But, papa,' said Anna, on the verge of tears herself, 'he is a boy, and if Mary kept answering him, I don't see why he should not keep answering her.'

'Don't you, Anna ? Because, although no altercation would make Mary forget she was a lady, a very short one makes poor Frank forget not only he is a gentleman but a Christian. Mind, I do not say that originally very likely one was not quite as much to blame as the other.'

‘Indeed, papa,’ said Mary, in a low humble voice, ‘I was very provoking, and did say things quite as shameful as Frank—that,’ her face crimson and the words nearly choking her, ‘that Charlotte Lee liked to have some one to flirt with.’

‘Oh, Mary!’

‘I am very sorry, papa;’ her tears flowing unseen, but far faster in their penitence than the passion of five minutes ago.

‘Poor girl! Why cannot you and Frank give up so provoking one another?’ said the Vicar, sadly. ‘You are right, Mary; such a charge from a girl of sixteen against a guest who has not left her house ten minutes, is quite as shameful as Frank’s own unbridled words towards yourself. He was right; I was unjust. I cannot fairly blame one more than the other.’

Here Robert and Carry, no longer content with shouting ‘papa’ down the drive, ran in to find their late playfellow, and the Vicar went out to finish his game, wondering, poor man, what would be the consequence of this unfortunate collision with Frank.

The result was very simple. Half an hour’s passion spent in tearing along the Massing road, thereafter abiding penitence for having in the slightest degree defied his father’s orders; and coming in, regardless that those were present who knew nothing of his disgrace as well as those who did, he went straight up to his father, and said bravely, in a tone as far from impudence as insincerity,

‘I beg your pardon, sir.’

Poor, proud, haughty Frank, how much longer will you let your unhappy temper betray you into conduct for which your conscience forces you to apologize, shameful as one of your temperament feels apology to be.

Mary was not to be outdone in generosity and bravery. No wonder those few words shamed her into a generous rivalry, and that though not bold enough to speak before the many as Frank had done, she seized the very first minute they were alone to say,

‘Frank, I am very sorry I was so provoking. I told papa what I said, and he said I was quite as much to blame as you could be—that he had been unjust to you.’

‘How can he say so?’ answered Frank, roughly. And so the matter seemed to end.



CHAPTER XXIII.

A DISCOVERY.

A friend should bear a friend's infirmities,
But Brutus makes mine greater than they are.

Julius Cæsar.

ON the following Sunday morning, to the surprise of all the congregation, the Hall pew was once more occupied by Sir Hector and Sophy. Poor Sir Hector, no longer lolling over the high pew, twirling his bright moustache and looking far more of a great handsome boy than a husband of nearly twenty years' standing, but erect, grave, his arms folded across his breast; little Sophy, whom in her deep mourning, the last few months might well have seemed to have changed from an eager, good-tempered girl into a thoughtful, considerate woman, stood beside him, every now and then raising her eyes from her prayer-book to steal an anxious glance into the face beside her.

Coming out, Mrs. Arnold sent all the children, even Mary and John, home at once, but stayed herself to speak to her cousin and his daughter, who did not leave the church till the little churchyard was clear of all the villagers.

The greetings were grave and simple, but composed. Sir Hector inquired after Johnnie, was very glad to see him about again, told his cousin that

Harry was now at Ceylon, and Antoinette and her son and heir at Elton Merivale.

‘You are come to make some stay I hope, Hector?’ said Mrs. Arnold, kindly.

‘Why no, we leave to-morrow afternoon. I was wanting to wait for Mr. Arnold to ask him to come up and lunch with us, but don’t let us keep you standing in this sun.’

‘Oh, it will not hurt me! I am sure Frank will go, but if you leave so soon, could not you spare Sophy to spend the hours between the services with us?’

‘Would you like it, my dear?’

Sophy’s first eager look had said ‘very much,’ but now she answered, with her pleasant, honest smile,

‘Thank you very much, dear Mrs. Arnold, but I will come to-morrow morning instead, if you will let me? I do so want to see all my cousins; how grown dear Johnnie is!’

Here the Vicar joined them, and at once acceded to Sir Hector’s wish.

‘Good-bye, then, for the present,’ said the Vicar’s wife, holding out her hand.

‘Good-bye,’ and Sir Hector pressed it tight; ‘for it’s no good, I fear, asking Mrs. Arnold to lunch with us too?’ with something of his old bright, courteous smile.

Thus, he first called the Vicar’s wife by this formal title, and in a way which could hurt no one; but the words were not unintentional. She had ceased to be ‘Cousin Nancy,’ outwardly. Sir Hector had too often used this familiar title for the mere purpose of annoying and provoking his wife, ever

to use it again, now death lay between him and a woman, very ill-suited to him, it is true, but one whom he had asked to be his wife, had promised to love, honour, and cherish. Ah! he would have kept that promise far better now than a year ago—poor, unavailing regret!

Sophy did come the next morning, and was cheerful and kind, though Mrs. Arnold's fond, sympathizing kiss for a few minutes shook her composure, and filled her eyes with tears. But the children came running in to greet her, and she drove back her tears, kissed them all, and was soon far more her former lively, good-humoured self than Mrs. Arnold had believed possible. She forgot how young Sophy was, and that, although this was the first time they had met since Lady Agnes' death, eight long months really lay between the daughter and her mother's foreign grave.

An hour had passed by, and Sophy was looking eagerly through the drawings that John had executed with Miss Hopkins, delighting his mother and the boy himself, by saying how marvellously he had advanced since she had been his teacher, when the door opened, and Mrs. Hughes and Charlotte were shown in.

'I must apologize for being so early a visitor,' said shy, pretty Mrs. Hughes; 'but I have a reason, though I am afraid I am disturbing you.'

'Oh no, not at all,' said her hostess, pleasantly. 'Our only guest is Sophy Merivale. I think, dear Sophy, you have had the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Hughes before?'

Sophy held out her hand frankly, and did the

same by Charlotte, to whom her cousin introduced her ; and, upon Mrs. Arnold's calling Mary away, to take part in the discussion going on between herself and Mrs. Hughes, took Mary's vacant place, and engaged Miss Lee in immediate conversation.

Mrs. Hughes' reason for paying her visit at a time when Mrs. Arnold was sure to be at home, was one which might well delight Mary. The two girls' holidays were to begin the next week ; Mr. Hughes and herself had meant to take them both into Wales for a fortnight's holiday themselves ; but Charlotte had that morning received an invitation to pay a visit in London, which she was most eager to do, and so had been accepted already. Mr. Hughes had thought it would be dull work for Lucy to go alone, and that Mary Arnold might like to take Lotta's place.

'I know Anna is more Lucy's companion here,' concluded Mrs. Hughes ; but' (smiling), 'Mary is such a great favourite of John's, and he thought she had been looking so pale lately, that a little change would do her good.'

Mary's cheek was bright enough just then with pleasure and expectation. 'Oh, thank you ; it will be delightful !' she cried, quite freely, in her eagerness.

'Indeed, the change would do her great good,' answered her mother, fondly ; 'she grows too fast, and all the little ones are rather too much for her. If papa does not say no, I am sure I cannot.'

The Vicar never could say 'no' to Mrs. Hughes, even when she offered him more sugar to the tea which already had in it much more than he

wanted ; and so, in five minutes, the plan was quite settled.

This formed the topic of conversation for some time after Mrs. Hughes and her sister had driven off, whilst Sophy finished looking through John's drawings, and promised to send some of her own foreign sketches for him to copy, as soon as she was at Elton Merivale again. The old ones at the Hall, for which he asked, were really too bad for any one to copy.

'What, you are so grand an artist now, you despise the efforts we all thought so fine a year ago ?' asked the Vicar, smiling.

'Yes, I really do,' answered Sophy, good-humouredly ; 'and you must own it would be a great shame if, after all last year's masters and advantages, I had only stood still.'

'It would indeed. Well, I must be going back to my sermon ; but just look in, my dear, to say good-bye, whenever you must go. If I can get finished in time, I shall like of all things to walk back with you.'

'Oh, that is pleasant ! and I need not start till half-past twelve, quite ; papa will not be disengaged till one o'clock at the earliest.'

'Ah ! but what do you think of our new beauty ?' said the Vicar, still lingering.

'Miss Lee ? How pretty she is !—prettier even than Mrs. Hughes,' turning to Mary.

'Oh, do you think so ?—yes, she is very pretty,' answered Mary, with some constraint.

'And is so clever and pleasant ; we had such a long talk whilst you and Mrs. Hughes were busy.

I am so glad they are living at Marshlands ; they will make such nice friends for Mary and Aggie when we come back, if you wont think them intruders.'

' Ah,' said the Vicar, ' how glad I am to hear that next Christmas will, God willing, find you all settled here for good.'

' Yes, it will be such a comfort,' said Sophy, earnestly ; ' near you, nearer Netta, and at *home*. Aggesden has always seemed our real home, though we have lived so much more at Elton. You know Aunt Mary is going to bring her four children to England this summer, and will stay on at Elton and look after the poor people next winter at any rate. Do you know there is something in Miss Lee puts me a little in mind of the portrait of Aunt Mary in the breakfast-room here ?'

' Ah, you think so ? well, we have always thought her a little like Antoinette,' said the Vicar.

' Ah, so she is,' cried Sophy ; ' I was thinking it was a poor compliment to her to compare her with Aunt Mary, dear and good as papa says she was. Yes, how pretty Miss Lee is ; I don't know when I have taken such a fancy to any one ; how glad you must be, Mary, to have such a friend.'

' We are not very great friends,' said Mary, a little scornfully, after a moment's pause.

' No ?'

' I don't think you will like her so well when you know more of her,' answered Mary ; a sudden jealousy of Charlotte's in any way taking her place at the Hall emboldening her to speak her mind.

‘Oh, really? I am very sorry,’ said Sophy, looking perplexed; for from hearing of the Lees so constantly at the Vicarage, *she* had rather thought they had taken her own sisters’ places; ‘she seemed so bright and lively, and we discussed London and its concerts and galleries famously.’

‘Oh, yes—she is very *clever*,’ said Mary, drawing back as if (which she really thought) the fault she had to find with Charlotte Lee was something of far more moment than mere dulness of intellect would have warranted.

The Vicar turned and looked on his daughter, one moment only, ’tis true; but Mary knew what he meant, that there is a faint praise more slanderous far than open censure. And when Sophy said, ‘Oh, I am so sorry; I was thinking what a pleasant party we should make altogether,’ Mary seemed busy with collecting John’s scattered drawings, and made no answer at all.

Mr. Arnold went back to his sermon, Sophy stayed on chatting with his wife and Johnnie, Mary sat by, only now and then answering a question or making a remark, and as soon as Sophy and her father were off, went upstairs to her own room and bolted her door.

Poor Mary! her father’s glance had reminded her of the warning he had uttered more than eighteen months ago; ‘Ah, Mary, take care; it may be this is only not your way of sinning.’ Was it not so now? she might not be so perverse, capacious, or flighty as Charlotte Lee, but in her secret soul the young girl began to fear she was no less fond of approbation—no less desirous of pleasing—

no less secure that her own will was best, and bent upon carrying it out. Whilst she was only too sure that for the last three months she had been yielding with scarcely a single struggle to the greatest temptation her young life had ever known—daily growing more jealous of, and so more vexed with, Charlotte Lee : had been glad to humble her—glad to see her humbled, and oh, how bitterly annoyed at hearing even the fair face no one could deny her, praised or even criticised.

‘I have been growing more jealous, more uncharitable, more self-conceited every day,’ thought poor Mary, as she sat at the window overlooking the sunny Vicarage garden, her sad, weary head upon her hands ; ‘oh, why did Charlotte Lee ever come near me ?’

Why ? to try, and prove you. To him that *overcometh* will the crown of life be given.

Mary thought and thought till life itself grew dark, and the remembrance of that morning’s promised delight afforded far more pain than pleasure. How ill she deserved any such happiness, any such escape from home cares and vexations. And—her father knew it all ! Poor Mary ! perhaps for the first ten minutes this was the sharpest thorn of all the crown she had for these last six months been wreathing. To think he who was so generous, so humble-minded himself, had so long cherished, loved, and commended all the diligence and consistent usefulness of her daily life, should now have learnt how jealous, how mean, how puffed-up in her own conceit she had all the while in secret been.

But this feeling did not last ; such mortification

was not long Mary Arnold's sharpest grief. She was a Christian, a member of a household in which silently, but how consistently, all conduct was referred to a truer, surer balance than man's judgment. Mary thought of the other Father who must so long have seen and known the sin that she had unheeded allowed to grow up within her, till, quiet and reserved as she was, even her earthly father had discovered its baneful existence. It was against Him she had chiefly offended—had been offending daily all these weeks that her father had known nothing of the jealousy mastering and embittering the daughter of whom he had always thought so well. And Mary knelt down and prayed to be forgiven and to be strengthened for the sake of Him whom even such puerile sins as hers had helped to hang upon His cross.

Charlotte Lee and herself would be wholly separated for three weeks at the least, how she would strive in those three weeks to conquer jealousy and anger, conquer her own overweening love of man's approbation, struggle to be charitable ; at least to follow out one wholesome resolution made in the midst of all this shame and humiliation, never to speak one ill word of her once friend unasked, and even to avoid such, as much as honesty would permit her, if asked.

Dinner was never very punctual, and to-day, though the Vicar had left word no one was to wait for him, was not ready till so late that Mary had full time to be silent and think, after her confession and prayer were over.

Still, all that afternoon she was more than usually subdued and quiet, took Robert and Mabel for a

walk indeed, ran up Anna's tuck with rather more befitting stitches, and, her mother having a headache, undertook the pouring out of tea. But Mrs. Arnold could not but see that Mary was out of spirits, and almost began to fear the Hughes' projected tour might, after all, be more than she would be equal to.

'She is a great deal too tall, thinks and does a great deal too much for her age,' thought the mother, with whom, with good reason, Mary had always been a favourite; 'I wish she did not put me so in mind of dear Emily.'

The Vicar had come home only just in time for tea; he had lunched with the Merivales, and after they were off, had gone a long parish round. When the tea party broke up, he took up his book and sauntered, sometimes reading, sometimes in thought, up and down the garden walk, as was his custom these pleasant summer evenings.

Anna and Carry wanted a walk, Bridget agreed to go with them, Harry was coming, Johnnie and Frank were coming, would not Mary come too? Anna asked.

'Mary is tired, Anna,' answered her mother for her; 'you must do without her to-night.' Then, when Anna was gone, 'Mary dear, you have been overdoing yourself a long time, I'm afraid; lie up here and rest a little, dear child.'

Mary returned the kiss warmly, suffered herself to be laid up, but honesty prompted her to say,

'It's not that I am so tired, mamma.'

Mrs. Arnold sat by her side, sometimes talking, sometimes silent, till at last bustling and shouting

ceased, and the large walking party were off. Mary lay watching her father pace up and down the walk, afraid every minute he would look in and call out his wife, yet too shy to seize the fair opportunity now within reach to open her aching heart to the only fellow-creature to whom as yet she had ever found it possible to do so. Perhaps this was the only point upon which Frank and Mary agreed.

At length to her comfort Mrs. Arnold was called away, and her footsteps were scarcely out of hearing before Mary sprang up, was in the garden, and at her father's side in a moment.

'I am wanted?' he asked good-humouredly, looking up from his book.

'No, papa; that is—could——'

'*You* want me, perhaps,' closing the book, and putting his finger in the place. Well, dear, what is it?'

'Oh papa—you know,' turning away her face.

'Know? I think not; there,' putting her arm through his, 'tell me what it is.'

'I thought you saw—would know without my telling. But indeed I only found it out to-day.'

'Dear Mary, be a little plainer. What is it that is so distressing you?'

The Vicar little thought what a train of present misery his half surprised, half reproachful glance had fired, mercifully fired.

'To find how spiteful, how jealous I have been. How I have almost hated Charlotte Lee.'

'Hated! my dear Mary.'

'It must have been hatred. I spoke against her to Frank, to Sophy—was glad when Mr. Hughes

found fault with her, or even only laughed at her, and—thought myself so much better all the time.’

Sobs and shame nearly choked Mary’s voice, and the Vicar and his daughter walked on a few minutes in silence.

‘My dear child,’ he said then, ‘I am very glad you have told me this.’

‘Oh ! papa, I thought it would so pain, so disappoint you, but I could not help coming to you—I could not bear you should think me better than I was.’

‘I do not mean of course that I am glad, no, I am very, very sorry that such feelings have ever existed ; but as they did exist, I am very glad you have discovered them for yourself, and repent them so heartily as one of your temperament must do, to humble yourself needlessly by confessing them to another.’

‘Oh ! papa, I have so longed to tell you all day. It was your looking at me when I was speaking to Sophy, papa ; it seemed to me like our Saviour’s—Mary bowed her head reverently—‘turning and looking upon Peter. It made me see it all.’

‘Ah ! how difficult to us all is that simple-sounding command, ‘Let no man think of himself more highly than he ought to think ;’ and again there was a pause.

‘Papa,’ said Mary, colouring very high, ‘I have prayed for myself, but will you pray for me ?’

‘Always, my dear child.’

‘And this going to Wales, papa ; I don’t deserve any such pleasure—I had rather stay at home.’

‘No, Mary, that would not do. Lucy wants a

companion ; Mr. and Mrs. Hughes want to give you pleasure ; you must not think only of your own good even in self-denial.'

'One thing will be so hard, papa. Mr. Hughes is always so kind to me, often says little praises, and I do care for them so much.'

'Then, my dear child, let this fortnight with the Hughes's be a trial of the sincerity of your longings after humility. When you are praised, remember that He who was meek and lowly of heart can alone guide us safely through this world's temptations, and give us grace to follow in his own meek footsteps.'

'You think I ought to go, then?' asked Mary, after a little pause.

'Yes, decidedly ; the invitation is accepted, changes are never liked ; besides, a little rest and change will do yourself great good.—And remember, Mary, he is not a good soldier who shrinks from any struggle for fear his arms should be broken, his colours taken,—rather he who bravely goes forward wherever the station in which God has placed him leads him, trusting the issue unto Him who will not suffer any one of us to be tempted above that he is able to bear.'

Again there was a few minutes' silence, first broken as they passed the window, by Mrs. Arnold's looking out to say, 'Papa, don't keep Mary out any longer, she is over-tired already, poor child.'

'Not more than a minute, then,' and the two passed out of sight. 'There, I must not break my word. God bless you, my child.'

‘Oh, papa ! let me—’ said Mary, breaking off, but completing her meaning by stretching up and kissing his cheek ; then going back to the sofa, and her mother going out to her father, lay in thought till dusk and nine brought in the children and supper.



CHAPTER XXIV.

FAREWELLS.

Unspotted from the world and pure,
 Preserve them for Thy glorious cause,
 Accustomed daily to endure
 The welcome burden of Thy cross :
 Inured to toil and patient pain,
 Till all Thy perfect mind they gain.

MARY did go to Wales, and great good did the change do her. Her hostess was no great walker ; thus if Mr. Hughes and Lucy were bent on too long an expedition, not only was her weakness sheltered, but she had a companion at home, and the young girl and Mrs. Hughes spent one or two such mornings of every week trying to sketch some of the beauties around them.

The fortnight was prolonged into three weeks ; on a Friday Marshlands was reached again ; but so late in the evening, it had been settled Mary should that night sleep at the Rectory. The Vicar drove over for his daughter and her luggage the next morning, staying to hear a few of his friends' late adventures before carrying her home. Mary came running in to greet him, looking quite a different being from the pale-faced, languid-footed girl from whom he had parted three weeks ago : mountain-air had tinted her cheeks, invigorated her step, cheered her voice. There was no need to ask

whether she had enjoyed her tour or liked her companions.

The next day the Vicar gave notice that a Confirmation would be held at Marshlands on August the twenty-second. Many young hearts trembled, many young eyes glistened as that notice was read.

‘John,’ said the Vicar, walking with his lad that pleasant summer evening, ‘think, will you, whether you would wish to be prepared for this Confirmation as well as Mary.’

John walked on in silence a few minutes.

‘I am very young, father,’ he said, then.

‘Yes, you are young, and I wish you quite to decide for yourself. Only, it may be before another comes round you will be at Eltham again, even at Woolwich, and there strangers must prepare you. No confirmations begin here before your holidays would be over.’

‘If you don’t think me too young, I—I should like it,’ said John quietly, his lip trembling a little. ‘I like school very much, but it is much harder to do right there than at home. This would help me.’

‘Yes, my boy.’

‘You know,’ with a great effort and a sudden scarlet flush,—‘no, you *can’t* know how wicked I often am ; but—but, if you will let me, I should so like to go back with that help, and—to be prepared by you.’

The same choice the Vicar set before his elder son ; this was a very different matter. Frank’s face flushed crimson, and he answered, resolutely, at once, ‘Oh, no !’

‘You are under the usual age, Frank,’ said his

father, kindly, 'so I wish you, as I told Johnnie, to decide for yourself.'

'Johnnie! is he going to do it?' cried Frank, eagerly.

'Yes; he thinks it will help him in his school life.'

'It will in his; it must, so pure and good as he is; but me? oh, no! no!'

'I cannot agree with you there, Frank; but still I have no wish to alter your decision. I feel with you that the difference of your two dispositions does make a difference here. One may trust the pure stream of John's life to flow on, brave and sure, to the end; yours—'

'Must always be wicked,' said Frank, gloomily.

'No; but its turbid waters must take some time to settle yet.—Confirmation, and the blessing it would open to you, would help and strengthen you now; still, two years hence, I think, they will do more for you; and I do think, Frank, a stranger could more help you in preparation than myself.'

Frank thought a minute. 'Yes, I think he would,' he said, then, bluntly.

'I am sure he would. Frank, you are too despairing; if you make as much progress in the next two years as you have in this last, you will then, indeed, have given good proof of the sincerity of your wishes for amendment.'

'I never shall.'

'Frank, I cannot let you speak in this way. You speak so—forgetting that God has made you his son, and given you his grace at baptism—has promised never to leave you nor forsake you—will always give

strength equal to your need, if you do but ask for it ; nay, has Himself given those very longings after good which you allow the devil to tempt you to think will never bear such fruit as their Inspirer will accept. My dear boy, ‘Burnt offerings and sacrifices would I not !’ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, oh God, thou wilt not despise ! And Frank, thank God, this is the sacrifice you have offered Him—do offer daily.’

Frank made no answer.

‘And now, Frank, I will not keep you longer, but to say, from the bottom of my heart, ‘God bless and comfort you.’

Lessons had recommenced in Bridget’s school-room, and went on as regularly as they did at Marshlands, where Charlotte had returned, but not improved, or at least less willing than ever to make herself happy with her sister and brother-in-law. Mr. Hughes seeing this, that time and change had deepened instead of lessening her perversity, would have no more bickerings nor vexations, but took prompt measures to put an end to his pretty sister-in-law’s misery. He wrote to Colonel Lee, stating that Charlotte so infinitely preferred school-life, that as her future education had been entirely trusted into his own and his wife’s hands, they had decided the present arrangement should terminate so soon as a school, of which they felt assured her father would approve, could be found.

Lucy begged most anxiously to be allowed still to stay at Marshlands, and both the Rector and his

wife were very glad to find one, at least, of their young inmates had learned to love themselves and their home.

‘A hundred a year seems a great deal to give for the governess of one girl of fourteen,’ said the Rector one night to his wife.

‘Yes ; but in all essentials we like Miss Wardale so much.’

‘And should be sure to change for the worse,’ said Mr. Hughes, who had found this very true with his curates.

‘And papa will not mind at all, and—you know, Lucy would cost him quite as much at school, and we could not bear to lose her.’

‘No, indeed ! Emmie, I tell you what !’ suddenly sitting up ; ‘Miss Storey leaves Aggesden at Michaelmas ; Anna is Lucy’s great friend ; why not have her here for one quarter at least, to take Charlotte’s place ? It can only be want of means that drives a governess away there.’

‘No ; oh, how pleased, how delighted Lucy will be ! Dear John, I want to go over this very night to propose it.’

‘Do you, Emmie ? What an eager little woman you are ! but though I say it that shouldn’t, I do think the plan is a good one. Miss Wardale always has said Lucy wanted some companion of her own age to spur her on ; Lotta was too far beyond her. Anna Arnold is not very clever, but neither is our own good little Lucy, and she would have been terribly dull with no companion at all.’

The very next day Mrs. Hughes did drive over to propose her husband’s plan, in all honesty

and simplicity, proposing the arrangement as the greatest kindness to them all, for poor dear Lucy would otherwise be quite lost without dear Lotta. And in truth this was the only side of the question which Mrs. Hughes ever saw.

We need scarcely say with what pleasure such an offer was accepted by the Vicar and his wife. The Vicar did, indeed, wish Mary could have had the advantage of Miss Wardale in Anna's place, but of course never said so, and was most truly glad Anna's education should be so efficiently carried on, instead, as had seemed inevitable, being in many ways so very prematurely cut short; also very glad that Mary's charge, at any rate at first, should consist of children so much more within her powers of instruction and management.

Poor Bridget, alone, felt rather disconcerted by the news. It weakened her own very faint hope of again being kept on at Aggesden Vicarage.

Mary, too, it tried. Anna was so very fond of Lucy, that as she should still be within five miles of home, she was almost as pleased with the arrangement as Lucy herself; but she cared nothing whatever for the educational advantages which would have filled her elder sister with delight, even had Marshlands and Aggesden been five hundred miles apart. At first, Mary did feel it a little hard that she who would have been so much more grateful for, could have profited so much more by Miss Wardale's pains, should see them given to another who was already half afraid that this governess would work her harder than her own had ever done—all this Mary felt. But her contrition for her jealousy

of Charlotte Lee had been heartfelt and lasting ; should she now suffer a jealousy of her own open-hearted, affectionate little sister to take its place ? even grow up unperceived within her ? No ; the first consciousness of any inclination to feel jealous or vexed at all, frightened and humbled her, and sent her to her knees,

‘ And Satan trembles when he sees
The weakest saint upon his knees.’

And so the rest of Bridget’s stay was passing by all too quickly to herself and Mary, and others also. A few Sundays before she left Aggesden, Mary and John knelt beside her and their mother to receive their first communion. There, we will not try to follow them.

But one of whom John’s own heart was full did not forget him. Frank coming out of his school chapel, escaped his companions, got free into the fields by himself, far out of the reach of school-fellows or any fellow-man. And there is no more glorious temple-roof than God’s own sky, more marvellous pavement than the grass of the field which He himself has made.

Frank was already at such times more morose than sad. The activity and bustle of school-life had almost in spite of himself, cheered him and carried him along with it. Besides, he was again very hard at work. Barnes senior would be leaving at Easter, and thus another vacancy on the Foundation be open for competition, and whether Frank would or no, Mrs. Kelme’s hearty interest in his success made work more of a pleasure than a burden : even her kindly nod and smile when either was too

busy for more, cheered and pleased the boy many a time when worried or downhearted. Surely a master's wife may be little less than a divine messenger of love and purity to the boys battling around her in the turbid waters and thick temptations of a public school.

At least such seemed Janet Kelme to many boys at Market Rayston—boys, bold-hearted and faint-hearted, rough and yielding, alike.

Bridget's last night at Aggesden soon came : she was upstairs sadly finishing her packing, when there was a knock, and Mrs. Arnold, followed by Mary, Anna, Carry and Robert, entered.

'Miss Storey,' said Mrs. Arnold, much moved herself, 'I am afraid a very few words would upset us all, so I will at once ask you to accept this locket from my husband, myself, and your old pupils, as a very little remembrance of us—as a very little token of our love and gratitude.'

Bridget tried to speak, but the words choked her, and tears fell down her cheeks instead. Mrs. Arnold pressed her hand kindly, for the first, but not the last time, kissed the young governess' cheek, and then left Bridget and her elder pupils alone.

'That—that—is a little bit of Mabel's hair, and that Johnnie's,' sobbed Anna, in heart-broken gasps. 'We thought you loved them so—so—you—' but here the little girl broke down.

Partings are always so painful, we have all so many to go through ourselves, that there is no need to follow this one further.

CHAPTER XXV.

FAREWELL.

Dem dunkeln Schooss der heil'gen Erde
 Vertrauen wir der Hände That,
 Vertraut der Sämann seine Saat,
 Und hofft, das sie entkeimen werde
 Zum Segen, nach des Himmels Rath.
 Noch kostlicheren Saamen bergen
 Wir traurend in der Erde Schooss,
 Und hoffen, das er aus den Särgen
 Erblühen soll zu schönern Loos.

Das Lied von der Glocke.

God's-Acre ! Yes, that blessed name imparts
 Comfort to those who in the grave have sown
 The seed that they had garnered in their hearts,
 Their bread of life, alas ! no more their own.

Into its furrows we shall all be cast,
 In the sure faith that we shall rise again
 At the great harvest, when the Archangel's blast
 Shall winnow, like a fan, the chaff and grain.

Then shall the good stand in immortal bloom,
 In the fair gardens of that second birth ;
 And each bright blossom mingle its perfume
 With that of flowers, which never bloomed on earth.

LONGFELLOW.

WITH Bridget Storey our simple, homely, un-
 pretending heroine, we ourselves must leave
 Aggesden Vicarage. Often have the Vicar and his
 wife—even her own little pupils—thrust Bridget

quite out of sight ; but if no one grumbles at this more than Bridget herself would have done, we shall not have many reproaches to bear, after all.

But we have not yet parted finally with either Bridget or the Arnolds. Three years later, when Bridget was home for a five weeks' holiday, from the second situation in which she had been since leaving Aggesden, Mrs. Arnold wrote to ask her to come and spend these holidays with her old friends. A similar invitation had been sent once before, but illness in her own home had then kept the governess in Laurel-terrace.

How happily Bridget sat down to answer 'yes' to this kind letter. Poor little Bridget ! she had had her share of trouble and vexation since she left Aggesden. In the situation immediately following that in Worcestershire she had met with many disappointments, many petty slights and annoyances ; her father's illness had followed, and given her good excuse for leaving Reading. But she was not yet so happy with Mrs. Montague Robinson, at Hampstead, though only three miles away from home, instead of a hundred, as she had been at Aggesden. To see the Vicar, John, Anna, Mabel, again, might well cheer her rather weary heart.

John was once more waiting for her at Massing—at least, if that fine, charming-looking young fellow, leaning against a post, playing with the great dog at his feet, could be the Johnnie Arnold of three years ago. His companion was a tall, slight young lady, very simply dressed in a straw bonnet and dark shawl ; but of the face of neither could Bridget catch a glimpse as the train passed.

But the boy's eager start, his opening of the door of the carriage in which he had caught a glimpse of Bridget's well-known features ; his frank smile, his hearty shake of her happy hand, the bright wavy hair peeping from under the Glengary cap, all this could belong to no one but John Arnold.

Mary, who was close behind him, was more changed, still pale and thoughtful ; but her smile more frequent, her voice more cheerful. The everyday battle of life was no longer more than she could fight bravely, and with patience.

Once more John stowed away box and bag ; but this time room could be found for Bridget as well as the driver in the front seat. The paraphernalia for a three weeks' visit was nothing to that which her first stay at Aggesden had required.

'I can't offer to let you drive, Mary,' John said merrily then ; 'I do so want to drive Miss Storey into Aggesden once more, if she will let me.'

Mary made no objection, nor did Bridget ; and it in reality mattered little which sat beside her, for John never allowed Mary to be long left out of all the merry talking and eager questions and answers, which made a drive which, why now more than five years ago, had seemed rather long and weary, appear to-day ended almost as soon as begun.

Oh, how Bridget's heart bounded at the sight of the Church's low tower, the park-gates, a passing glimpse of Sir Hector and one of his sons (*which* Bridget could not tell, so fine and enormous a fellow had whichever it was become), as they galloped past the little pony-carriage with a bow and some

gay word. But, most of all, how delightful was the Vicar's kind, hearty grasp at the end of her journey ; Mrs Arnold's kind welcome, Anna's warm demonstrative joy ; bold, bluff little Robert's rather awkward but manly greeting, the very sight of Mabel's sweet, gracious beauty.

This time, after the first caress, it was not 'I have got such a pretty doll !' but something like it.

'Miss Storey, Johnnie has got *the* sword.'

'What, he has his commission?' she asked, eagerly, of John's father.

'Not yet ; he will in a week or two, though. But the boy carried off the sword of merit at Woolwich, and so much besides, I tell him his fellow cadets must be delighted to have got rid of him at last.'

John smiled and laughed, as his father, with the old habit he never could relinquish, laid his hand with such proud, confiding pleasure on a shoulder now nearly as high as his own head. Ah ! the Vicar often smiled, and said, with eyes glistening with something brighter than delight, that 'the only disrespect of which John had ever been guilty, was a very serious one—that of, from fifteen and upwards, systematically looking down upon both father and mother.'

Frank also was at home, not yet either so tall or so happy as John, nor would he ever be so ; neither was his gift by nature ; neither gift could be attained by any skill or industry. But he was very passably good-looking ; his dark hair had John's wave ; his eyes were as handsome and steady as ever, his mouth as firm, and

all-enduring, and fierceness and moroseness had nearly bade farewell to both these old familiar dwelling-places. If, three years ago, there had been a latent strength and force in the boy's face, even when at rest, that made one turn to look at it again, there was even more now, and also a vague, undefinable something which filled Bridget's eyes with tears,—the scars and wounds of four years' hard strife with self. But Frank, out of much tribulation, was at last gaining hope and peace, and knew that his father was beginning to look forward to his future career with only less expectation and confidence than to John's.

He had long been on the Foundation, was now working hard, with every prospect of success, for an exhibition to Queen's, vacant next winter. Harry had for a couple of years been his school-fellow at Market Rayston; dear, brave, good-hearted Harry, whose generous heart had here first known the bitter smart which unmerited ill-treatment from fellows he had never injured, from masters he had never cheated—would as yet scorn to cheat,—leaves lingering long behind it.

'How can Mr. Kelme treat me so?' he had half sobbed to Frank, one Saturday afternoon, three weeks after his arrival in the miniature world, of which he had so long eagerly desired to form a part. 'I never, never would have—'

'Never mind,' said Frank, kindly. 'You didn't deserve it, so it can't have hurt you much.'

'But he thinks I did. Papa would have believed me if twenty such sneaks as—'

'Come, Harry!'

‘Well, he is a sneak ; how could he let me be punished when he had done it !’

‘How could he ? because boys are—can be the wickedest, meanest fellows on the face of the earth ! But never mind, Harry ; if you keep straight, Mr. Kelme will find you out in time. He thought very badly of me once and with far more reason ; I wasn’t nearly so guiltless as you were to-day ; but how kind and good he is to me now.’

The Vicar never knew half the comfort, help, and strength Frank was to Harry that first half year. Few elder brothers, not only at Market Rayston but at any other such school, would have kept so constant though quiet an eye upon a brother four years younger than himself. And of great though unconscious use had Harry been to Frank. How could he ever set anything but the purest example to the little fellow thrust suddenly from a home of love and justice, into the cruelty, injustice, impurity of a public school ? Frank had never taken much notice of Harry at home, he did not outwardly take much notice of him here ; ‘let him swim on his own strength if he can,’ he thought, but if he saw him ready to sink, then Frank was ready to strengthen or scold. The only time Frank in two years’ school companionship raised his hand against his brother, was when he *had* combined with another boy to cheat Mr. Kelme, and was jesting at his success ; it was then too much in the spirit of Frank Arnold of old ; but Harry never resented it—more, never suffered James Bloxam or any one else to lead him thus astray again.

Anna was perhaps the most changed of all at

Aggesden Vicarage. Tall, strong, and stout she was now ; still at Marshlands except in holiday time and Sundays, but tamed down into a pleasant, straightforward, civilized young lady. By a now long-standing arrangement, one made soon after Bridget left her and at Miss Wardale's own generous suggestion, the pony-carriage, when sent on Saturday afternoons for Anna, always brought Mary for a music lesson. 'It was such a pity that Miss Arnold's real talent for music should not be further cultivated,' the governess had said drily ; and though now nineteen Mary still went, and had long far excelled Bridget in her favourite accomplishment, long ago ceased to rival Charlotte Lee, who from her married home in the Himalayas, writes to Mrs Hughes and Lucy letters so full of 'Alick' her husband, and 'Lottie' her baby, that Mr. Hughes has learnt never to despair of any one.

'How wifeness and motherhood ennoble every one,' he often thought, looking proudly at the pure, gentle mother of his own children, in which mother (though he scarcely liked even thus to own she *ever* had been anything but perfection,) he saw fresh virtues developing and old ones strengthening every day.

Mary in more ways than in music had not suffered so much by Bridget's loss as she had feared. Sophy Merivale, when she was once settled at Aggesden and had time to rest and think, at once took her old place as John's drawing mistress, and had soon asked Mary whether she would not learn also ; and perhaps it did Mary no harm to find that here, strive as she would, her drawings would bear no

comparison with John's; that even Frank, when one wet afternoon driven to take up John's paint-brush as an amusement, handled it with a breadth and freedom she had never attained. And these lessons also still went on, for Sophy Merivale had not followed Antoinette's example. How could she? What would her father, brothers, sisters, all Aggesden do without the blithe voice, brisk, quiet activity, open heart and ready sympathy that cheered all ills, was always ready to do, to hear, to help everybody around her.

There had been at the Hall, a year ago, an artillery officer of some standing, whom Lord Duthoyte had brought with him on a passing visit, who had seemed to the Vicar more attentive and courteous to his young hostess than even her position demanded. He had sailed three months later for India. Sometimes the Vicar feared a fresh young heart would fain have travelled with him, that honest simple prayers as well as favouring breezes had sped the gallant soldier on his way. But if so, the good man's own pious intercessions were bringing down a blessing on the head of the young girl he had so nobly left behind him. Sophy never drooped, never pined, was still the light and mainstay of her home. And if, sometimes when alone, tears would both gather and fall, they left no bitterness behind them, nor were they shed from any feeling of regret that she had told Colonel Ailesworth not only that for years yet she must not think of marriage, but that, as she could not let his offer be brought before her generous father, they must part as free as they had met.

So Sophy's voice never soured, her step never

flagged, and I don't think she is wrong in feeling sure that if climate and battle do but spare him, there is one who, without any grumbling, will wait twice seven years and more for her.

How far we have wandered from Mary's drawing lessons! yet there is this to say, that Mary, as well as Mr. Hughes, has learnt to be more patient and charitable; she seldom now repines over the selfishness of the rich.

Anna has been left further still. Brisk, kindly, warm-hearted Anna! such a favourite at Marshlands! such a favourite at home! A quiet but very firm friendship subsisting between herself and Frank, for can she not dance, and talk, and play as a young lady should? and had not she clung to him when little other love had fallen to his lot? Oh, how refreshing her happy, active nature is to his own darker, sadder temper; devoted admirer, as the young man is becoming, of blue-eyed, sweet-faced Mabel, who, for her part, when she cannot have papa, is never so proud and happy as with Frank, whose tenderness towards her nothing can exceed.

The day after Bridget's arrival was a Sunday. Once more she sat within the well-known church, not *pew*, for much had been done to restore, to preserve and beautify the little village church since she had last been within it; not, indeed, till such restorations had been long needed. Some good old folk there were who did not like to see their squire and his sons and daughters sitting upon open benches like themselves, as there had been those four years ago who liked the old, close, dusty schoolroom far better

than its fresh, picturesque supplanter. 'So wears the world away.'

Robert, now a man indeed, had for the last two years not failed to take his place amongst the Vicar's morning congregation. He is no better, no stronger, but he looks happier. I think he and Sophy had one little talk about Colonel Ailsworth, and that when Emma is grown up, if not before, these two young people settled the marriage might very well take place, 'for,' said Robert,

'Our dear father never can be rid of me'; and then leaning back, recalled the Vicar's advice to him one wintry afternoon some years ago, and smiled again.

One, alone, of the Vicarage party we have not mentioned, little plaintive Carry. Ah! two years ago the last sting of this world and its sin pierced her tender foot. After service the Vicar drew Bridget, who, with Mary, had waited for him, aside, showed her the little grass-grown grave and simple head-stone, and said, taking her hand in his, '*You* often helped our little Carry.—Oh, how much nearer does one having gone before us make heaven seem to all.'

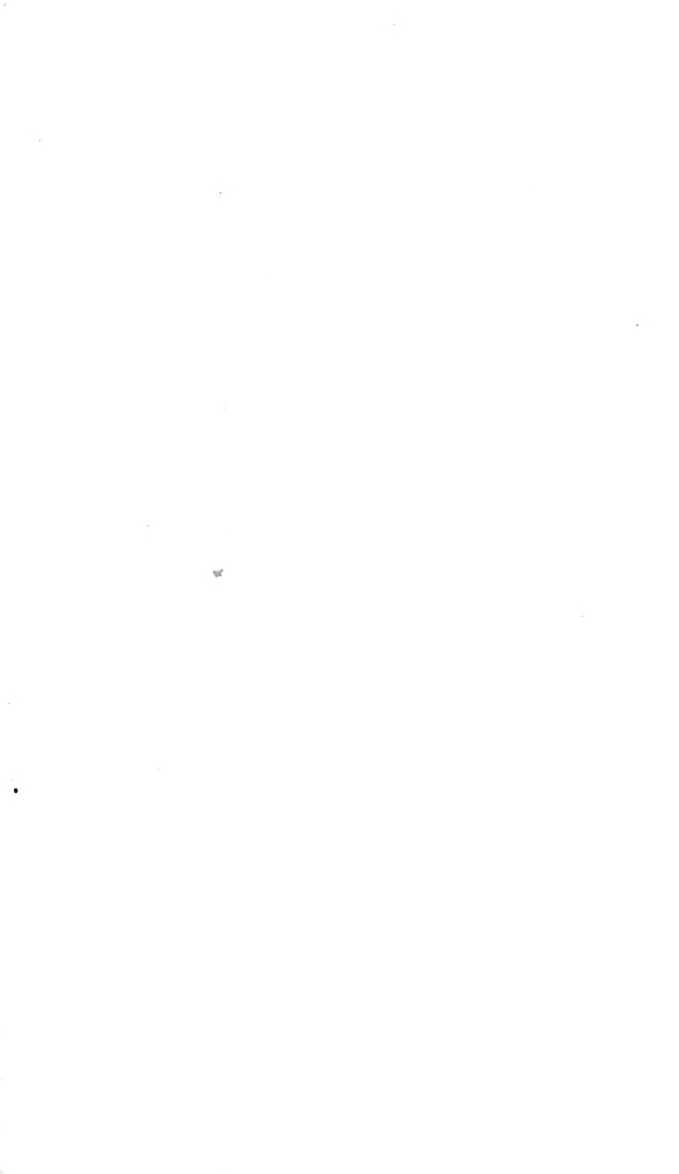
Bridget stayed three weeks—three sunny, happy weeks, at Aggesden; but these we cannot follow. Far more order, neatness, and comfort reigned within the Vicarage, thanks chiefly to Mary's increased but unobtrusive care, since she had last been there. Mr. Arnold still contributes to the *C.S.M.*, essays now in the place of the tales of earlier days, and his initials have penetrated far,

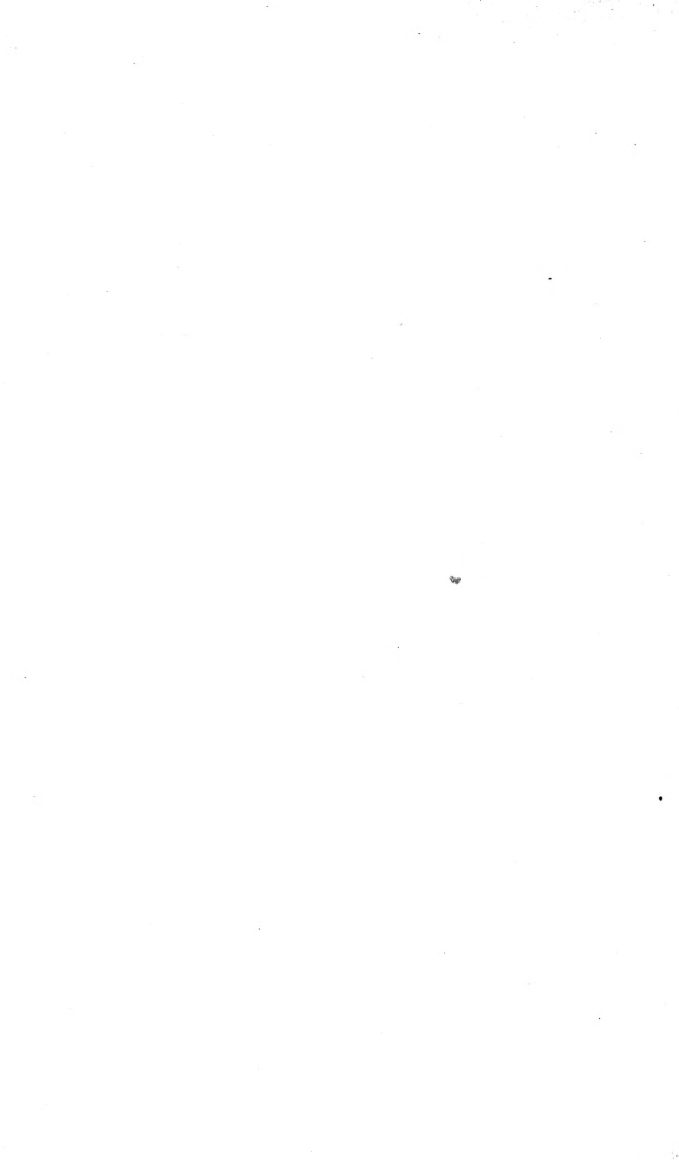
and ensure a good reception wherever they travel. His wife and sons still keep his secret, and his own right hand does now largely augment his income, though outwardly he is scarcely a richer man ; needs and desires increase with means. Frank is to go to Oxford, whether he gains the exhibition or not ; Harry is to be kept at school, Robert to follow him ; and, as if it were not already large enough, a new member will soon be added to his household in little Carry's place, his brother Tom's now orphan daughter.

Poor little orphan child ! Strange faces do, indeed, await you in your unknown fatherland ; but also tender hearts. I think, at the last great day, you will be one of the many who will arise to call the Vicar 'blessed !'

THE END.

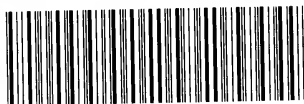
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